STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 72

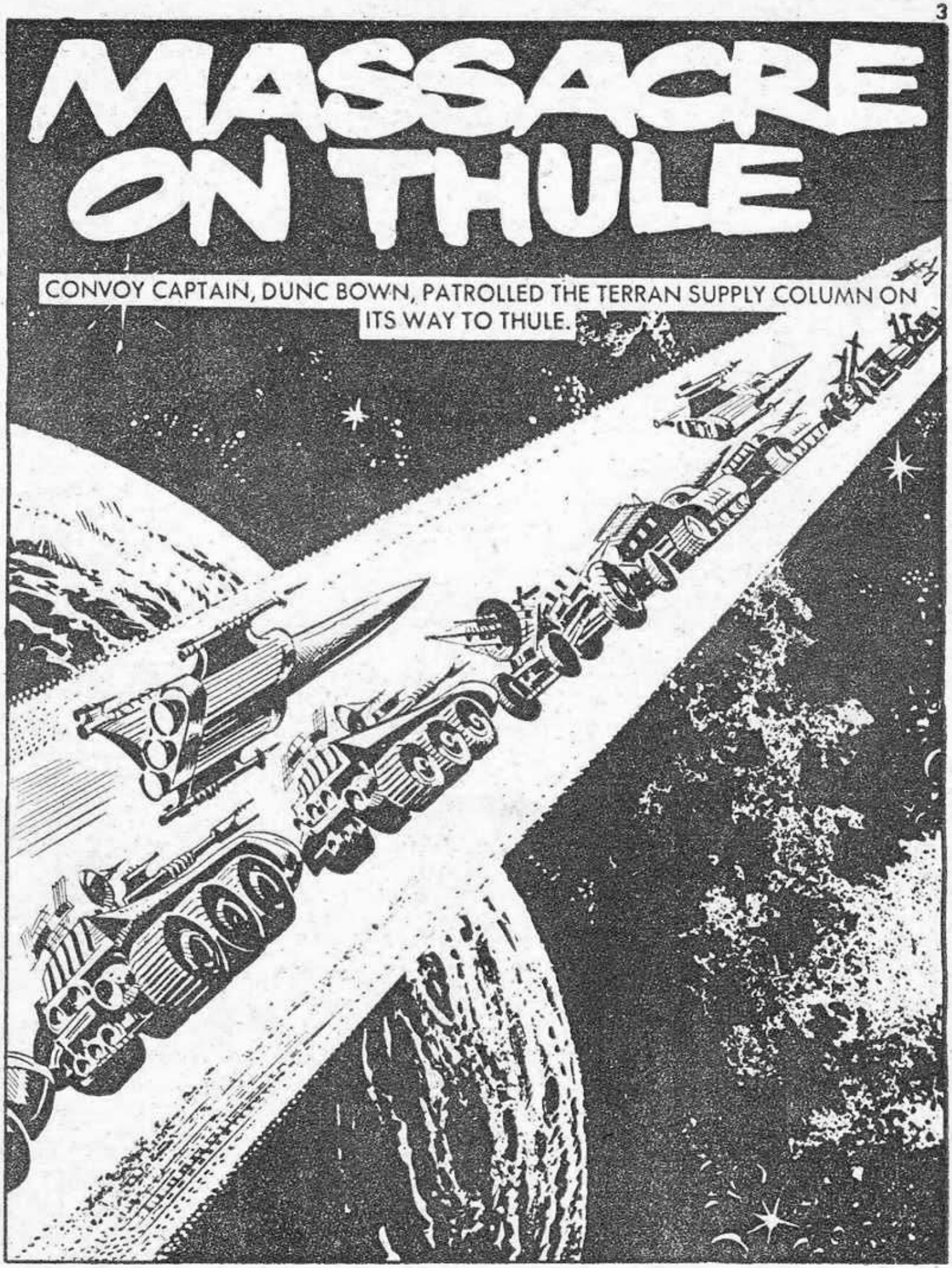
16p

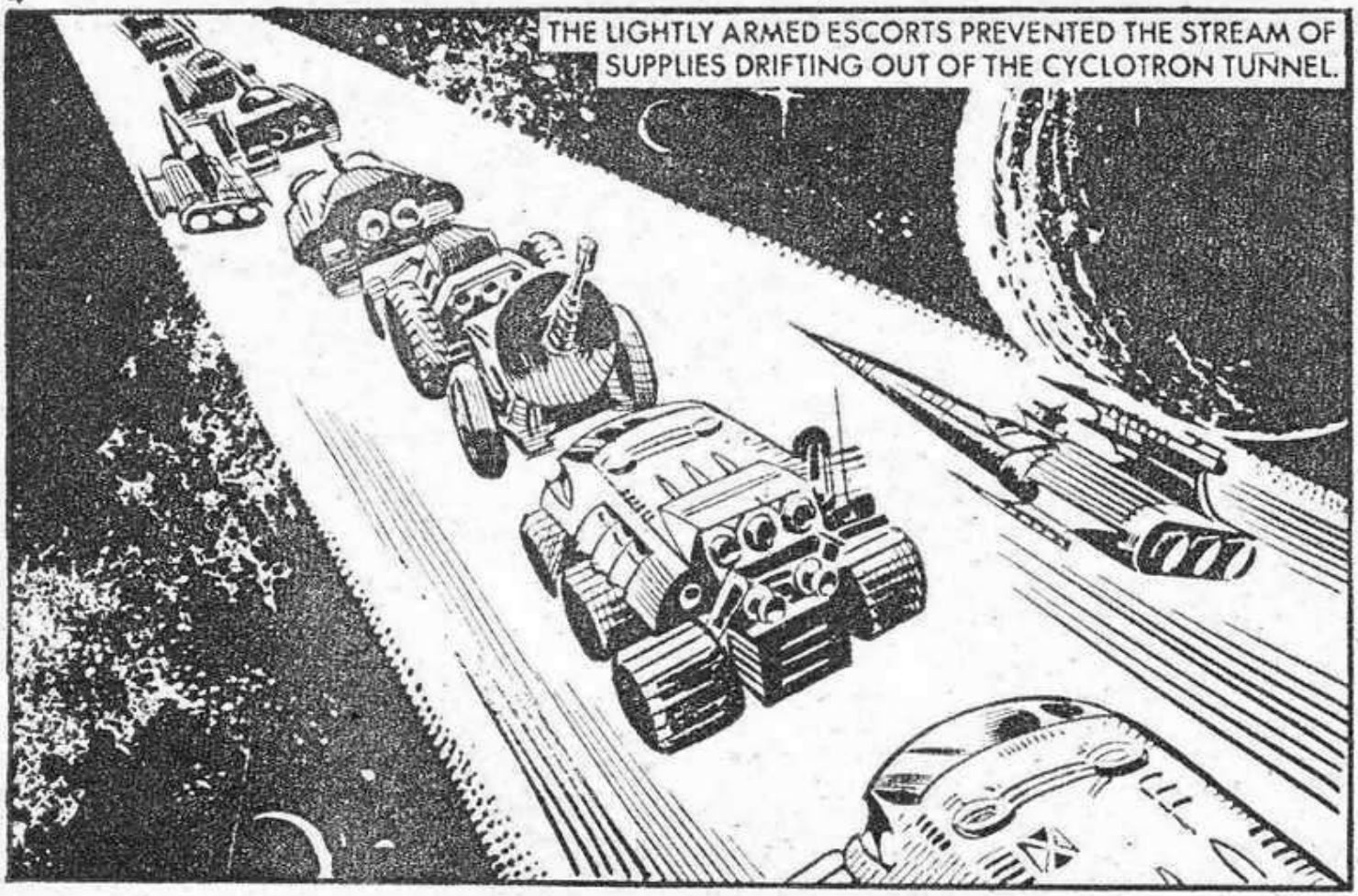
MASSACRE ON THULE

STARBLAZER

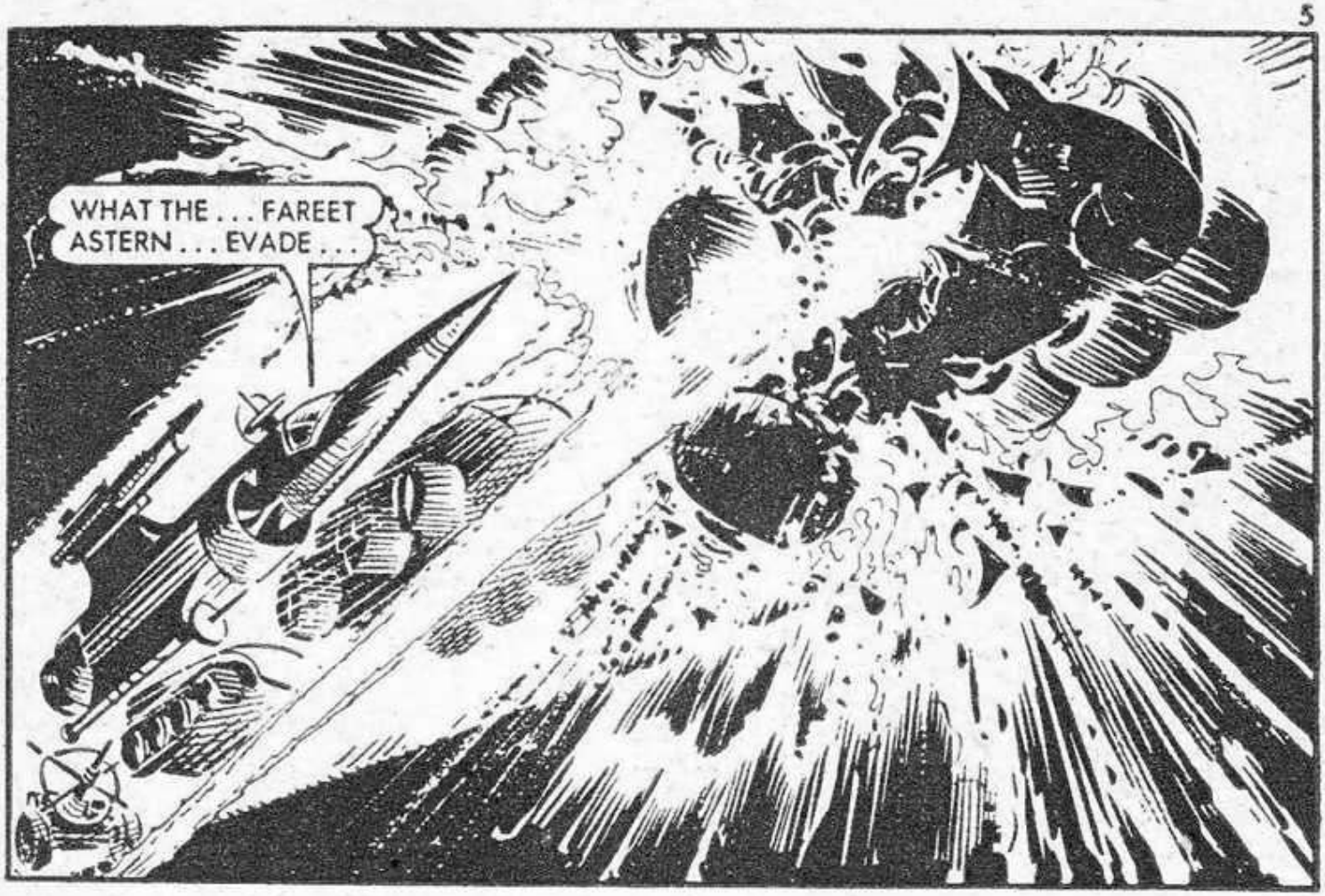
THE TERRAN CONFEDERATION WAS LOCKED IN GRIM CONFLICT WITH THE BRUTAL, WARRIOR NATION OF FAREET. ON EARTH'S GALACTIC OUTPOST, THULE, THE FIGHTING WAS FIERCEST. NEITHER SIDE HAD SPACECRAFT CAPABLE OF REACHING THE OTHER'S HOME PLANET, SO THULE WAS NEEDED AS A STEPPING STONE. WHOEVER CONTROLLED THULE WOULD WIN THE WAR. TO SUPPLY. THULE, THE TERRAN CONFEDERATION DEVELOPED THE CYCLOTRON TUNNEL, A BEAM OF PURE ENERGY THAT COULD SEND SUPPLIES AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT—AND THE FAREET DID THEIR BEST TO WRECK IT . . . AND THE STRANDED EARTH ARMY.

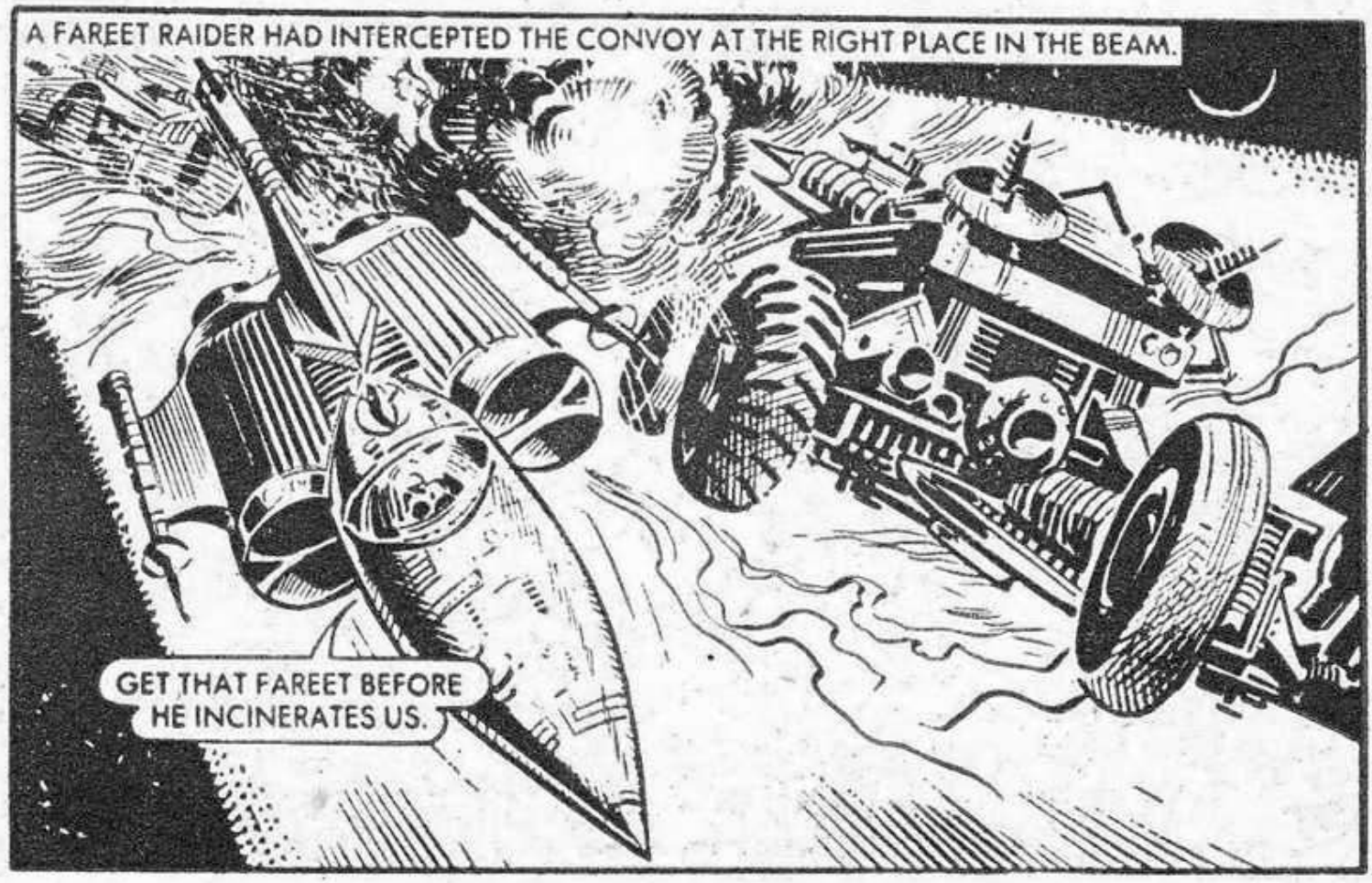
MASSACRE ON THULE

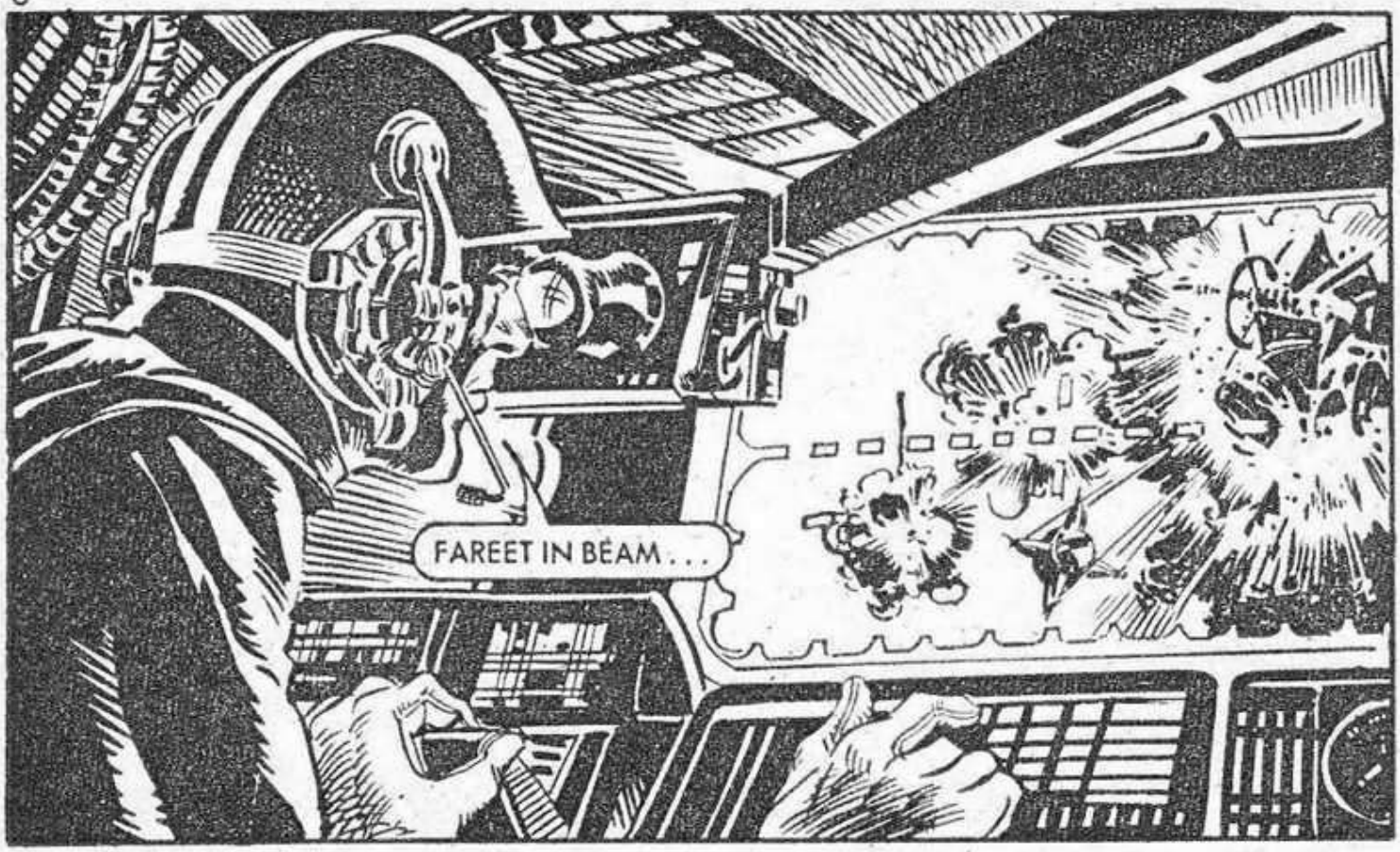


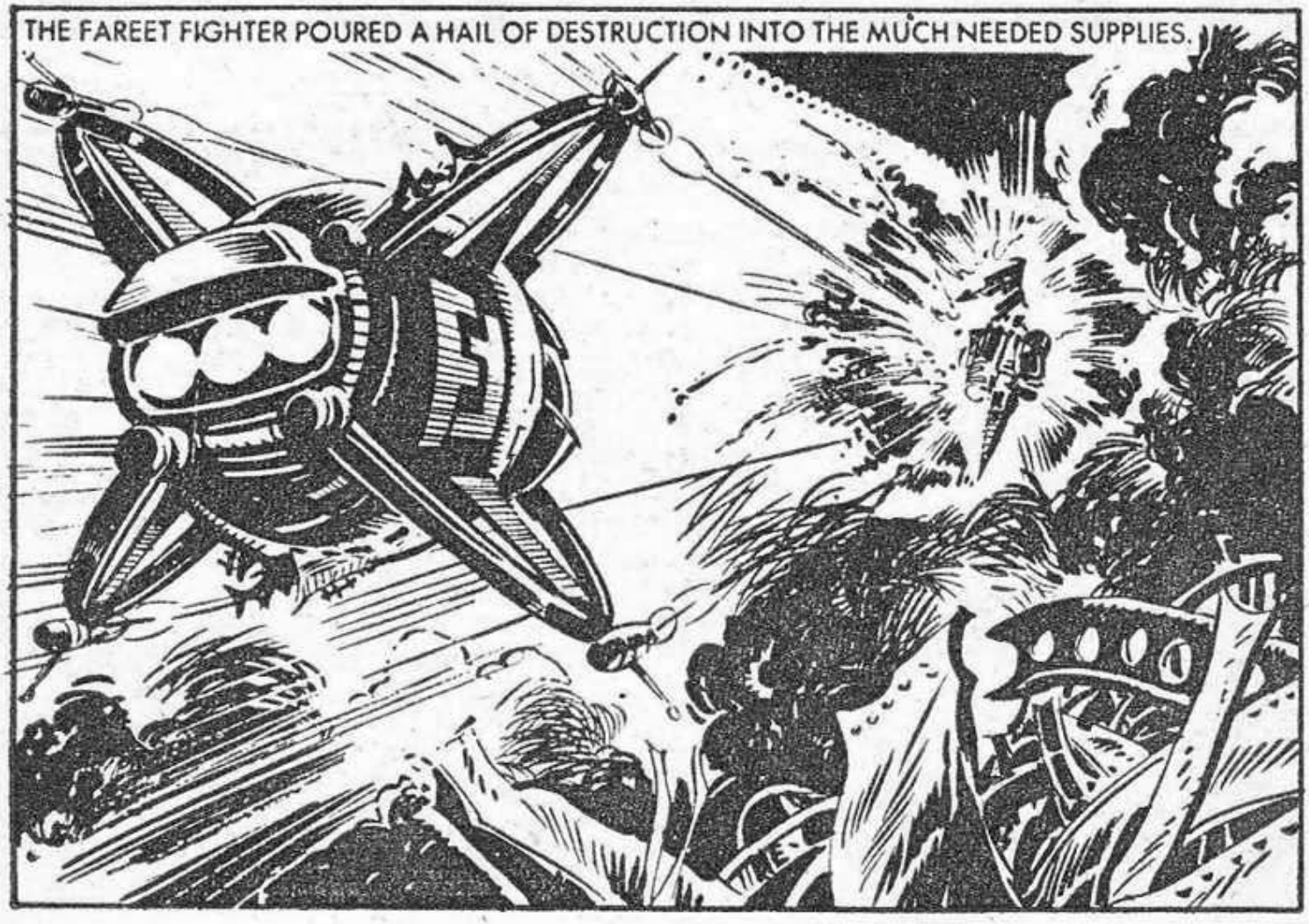

THE LIGHTLY ARMED ESCORTS PREVENTED THE STREAM OF SUPPLIES DRIFTING OUT OF THE CYCLOTRON TUNNEL.

ESCORT LEADER TO SHEEPDOG . . . SLIGHT DRIFT, PART A, MIDSHIPS . . .


WHAT THE . . . FAREET ASTERN . . . EVADE . . .


A FAREET RAIDER HAD INTERCEPTED THE CONVOY AT THE RIGHT PLACE IN THE BEAM.
GET THAT FAREET BEFORE HE INCINERATES US.


FAREET IN BEAM . . .


THE FAREET FIGHTER POURED A HAIL OF DESTRUCTION INTO THE MUCH NEEDED SUPPLIES.

ONCE AN ESCORT SPUN OUT OF THE CYCLOTRON BEAM, ITS SPEED DROPPED FROM 99.9% OF LIGHT SPEED TO SOMETHING LESS THAN 10% OF LIGHT SPEED — AND AS A RESULT, THE CONVOY SPED OUT OF RANGE IN MICROSECONDS.

FULL BOOST! WE'LL GET BACK IN THE BEAM IN 4.1 SECONDS.

BY THE TIME THE ESCORTS RETURNED, THE FAREET WERE GONE.

TOO LATE . . . WE'LL NEVER CATCH THE FAREET. THAT'S ANOTHER CONVOY WIPED OUT.

BOWN TO TERMINAL. CONVOY DESTROYED. ALL BUT ONE ESCORT WIPED OUT. MY SHIP EXTERIOR WILL REQUIRE RADIATION DECONTAMINATION ON ARRIVAL.

THE LONE FAREET RAIDER'S CAPTAIN REPORTED TO HIS WARLORD.
THE BATTLE RUNS OUR WAY. THEY HAVE NO WAY OF STOPPING THE DESTRUCTION OF THEIR CONVOYS.
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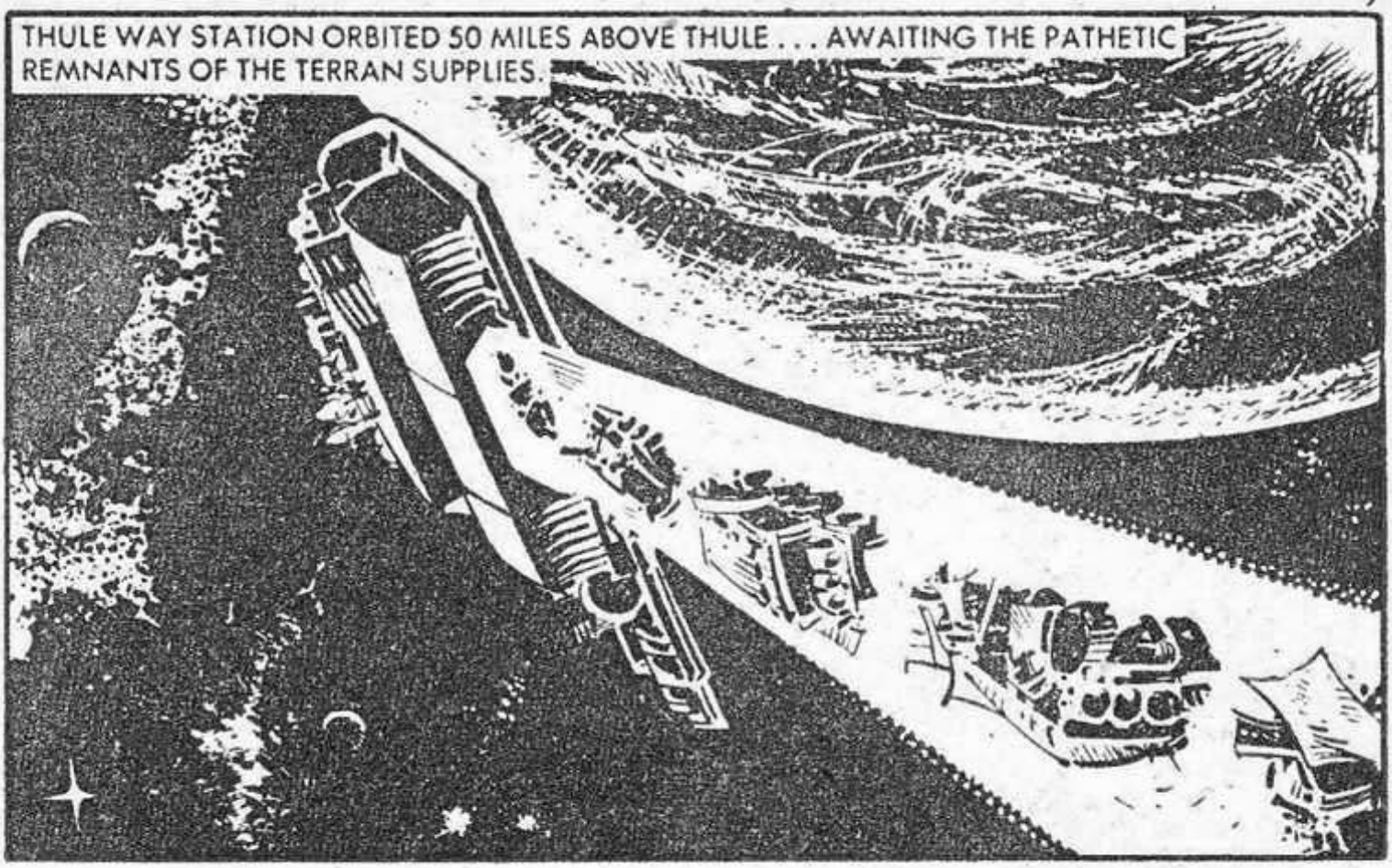
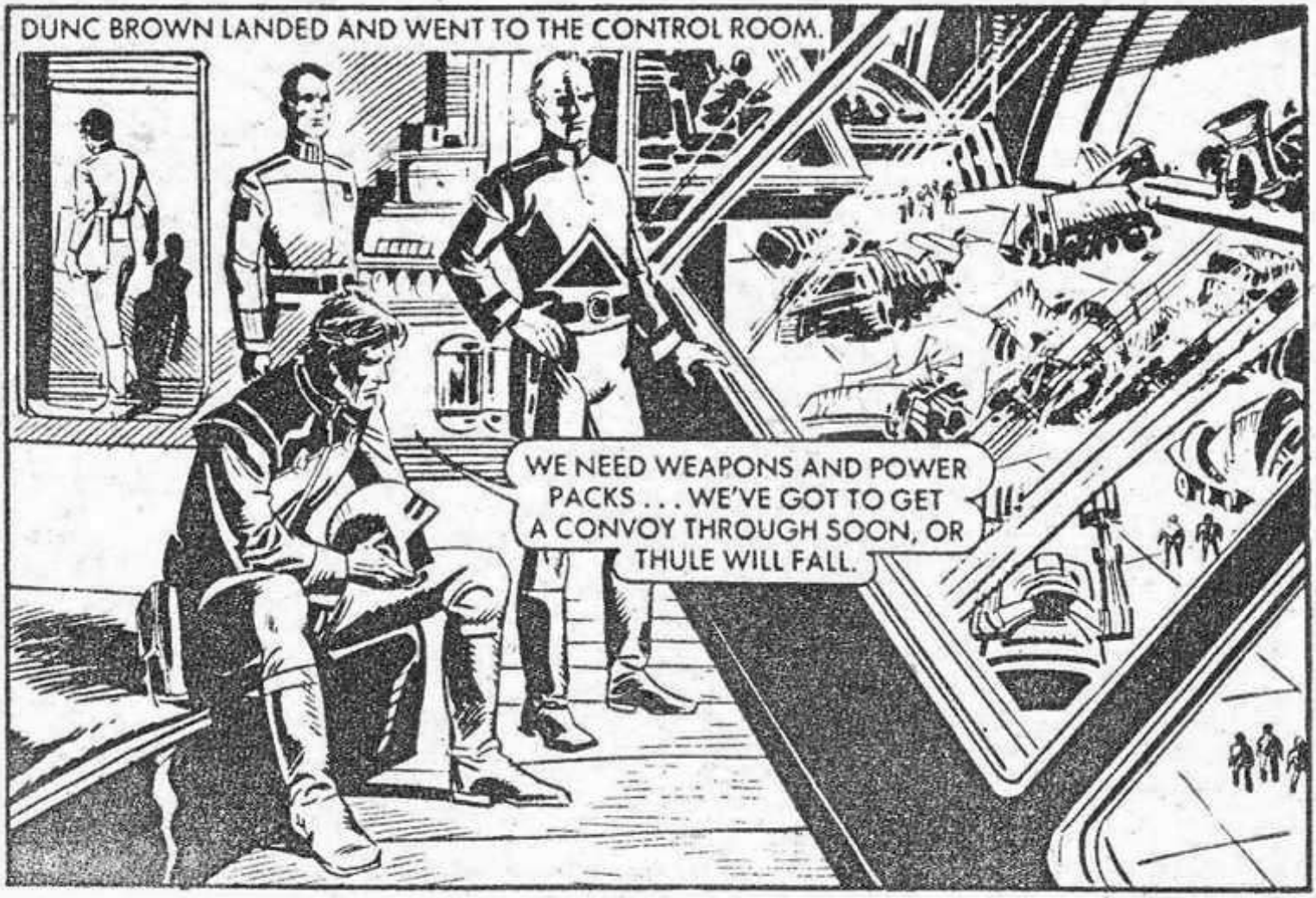
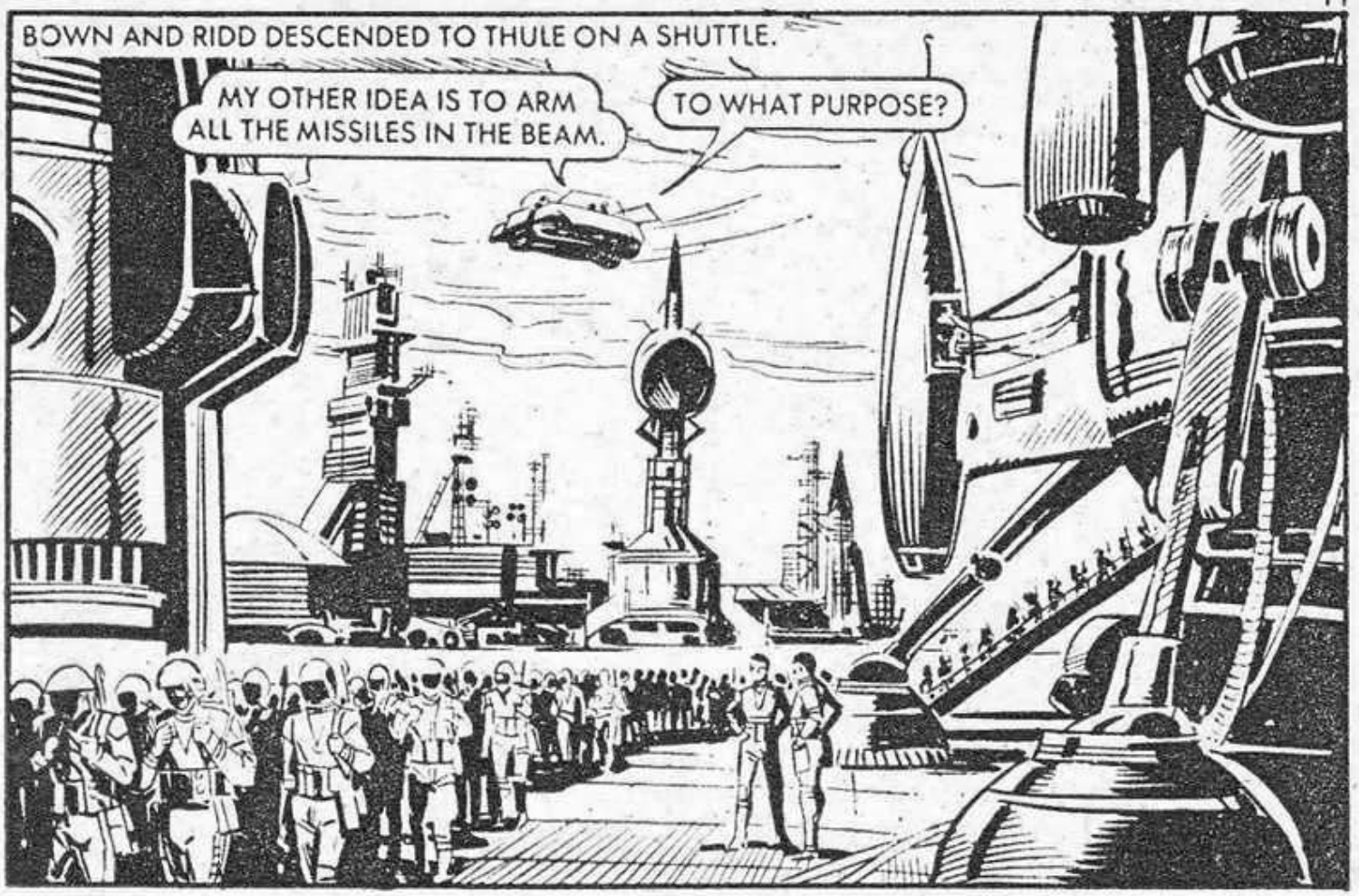
GOOD! PUT ANOTHER THREE VESSELS ON THE EARTH-THULE PATH — WE SHALL BRING THEM TO THEIR KNEES.
YES, WARLORD GANNO.


THULE WAY STATION ORBITED 50 MILES ABOVE THULE . . . AWAITING THE PATHETIC REMNANTS OF THE TERRAN SUPPLIES.


DUNC BROWN LANDED AND WENT TO THE CONTROL ROOM.
WE NEED WEAPONS AND POWER PACKS . . . WE'VE GOT TO GET A CONVOY THROUGH SOON, OR THULE WILL FALL.

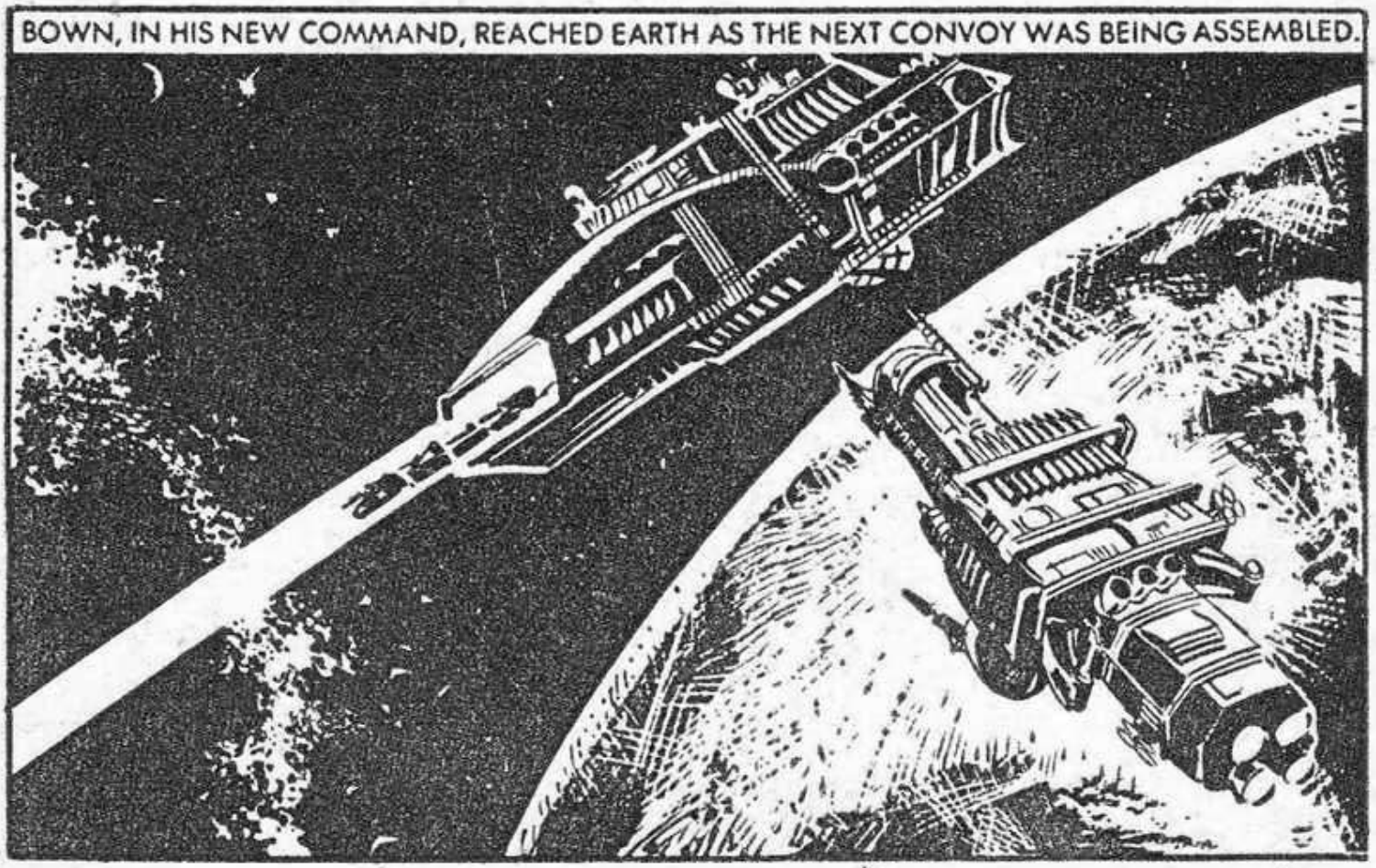
WHAT WENT WRONG?
WE WERE KNOCKED OUT OF THE BEAM BECAUSE OUR FIREPOWER IS INSUFFICIENT. I HAVE IDEAS ON HOW TO IMPROVE IT.

THE NEXT CONVOY MUST BE GUARDED BY A WARSHIP, EVEN IF YOU CAN ONLY SPARE ONE.
YOU'LL GET ONE AND FOR THAT TRIP ONLY.


BOWN AND RIDD DESCENDED TO THULE ON A SHUTTLE.
MY OTHER IDEA IS TO ARM ALL THE MISSILES IN THE BEAM.
TO WHAT PURPOSE?

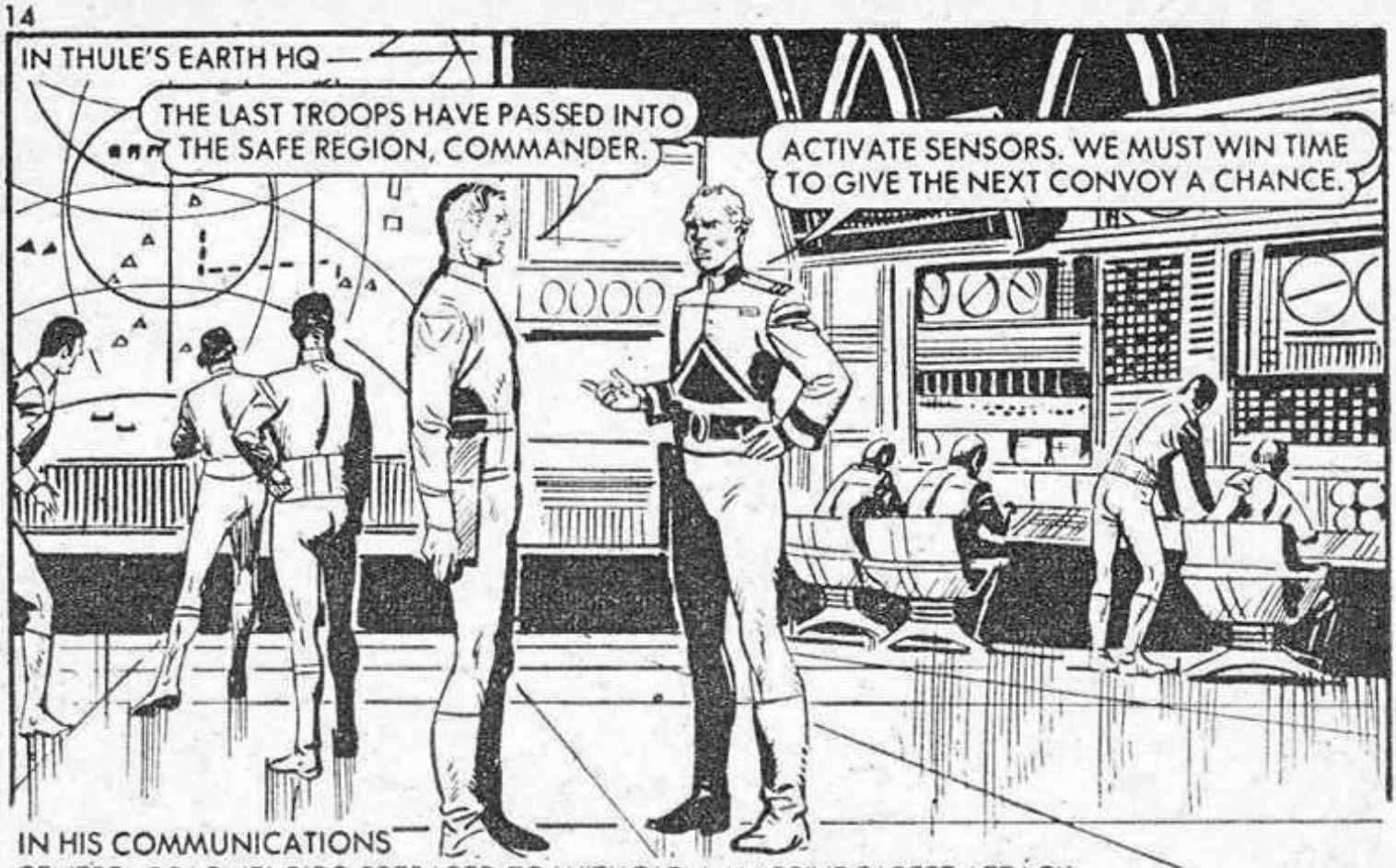
THE WARSHIP'S SYSTEMS COULD CONTROL THE SERVOMECHANISMS OF THE MISSILES WITH VERY LITTLE ADAPTATION.
THEN YOU'D HAVE A GIGANTIC ARSENAL FLOATING IN SPACE!
TE 136

THAT'S ALL I CAN SPARE . . . AN ESCORT FRIGATE. IT'S FAST AND HAS TREMENDOUS FIREPOWER. YOU'LL COMMAND IT.
STAR BLAZE
FIRST I'LL GET THE CAPTAIN TO DETAIL A CREW FOR PRIMING THE MISSILES. WE'LL RETURN TO EARTH TO PICK UP THE NEXT CONVOY.

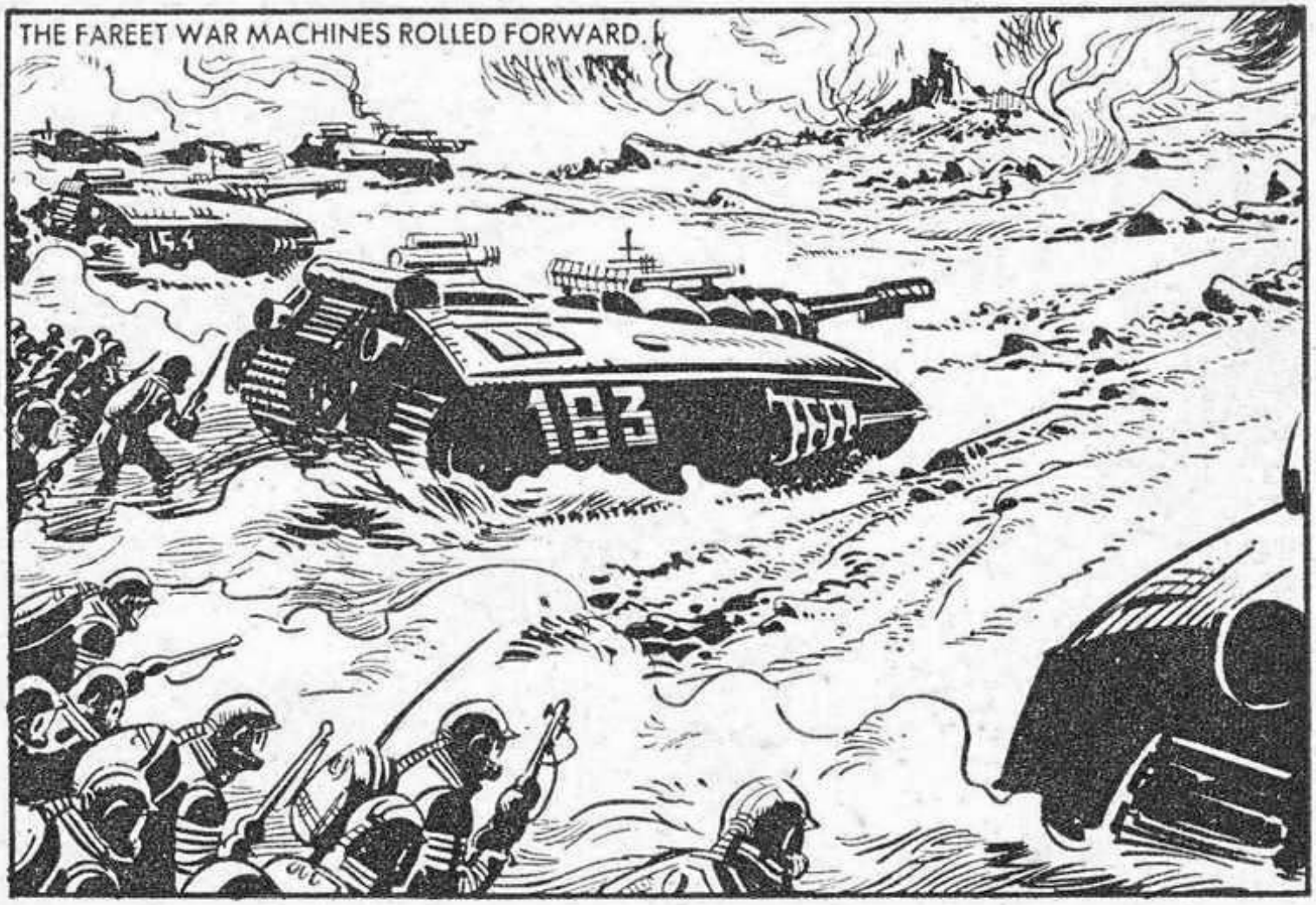

BOWN, IN HIS NEW COMMAND, REACHED EARTH AS THE NEXT CONVOY WAS BEING ASSEMBLED.

ON THULE, THE WAR WAS GOING BADLY FOR EARTH. OUTNUMBERED TROOPS, SHORT ON FIREPOWER, WERE FORCED TO RETREAT.
DISENGAGE — RETREAT — DON'T WASTE LASER POWER.

EVEN THE RETREAT WAS HAZARDOUS, WITH FAREET ROBOCRAFT PICKING OFF ISOLATED GROUPS.



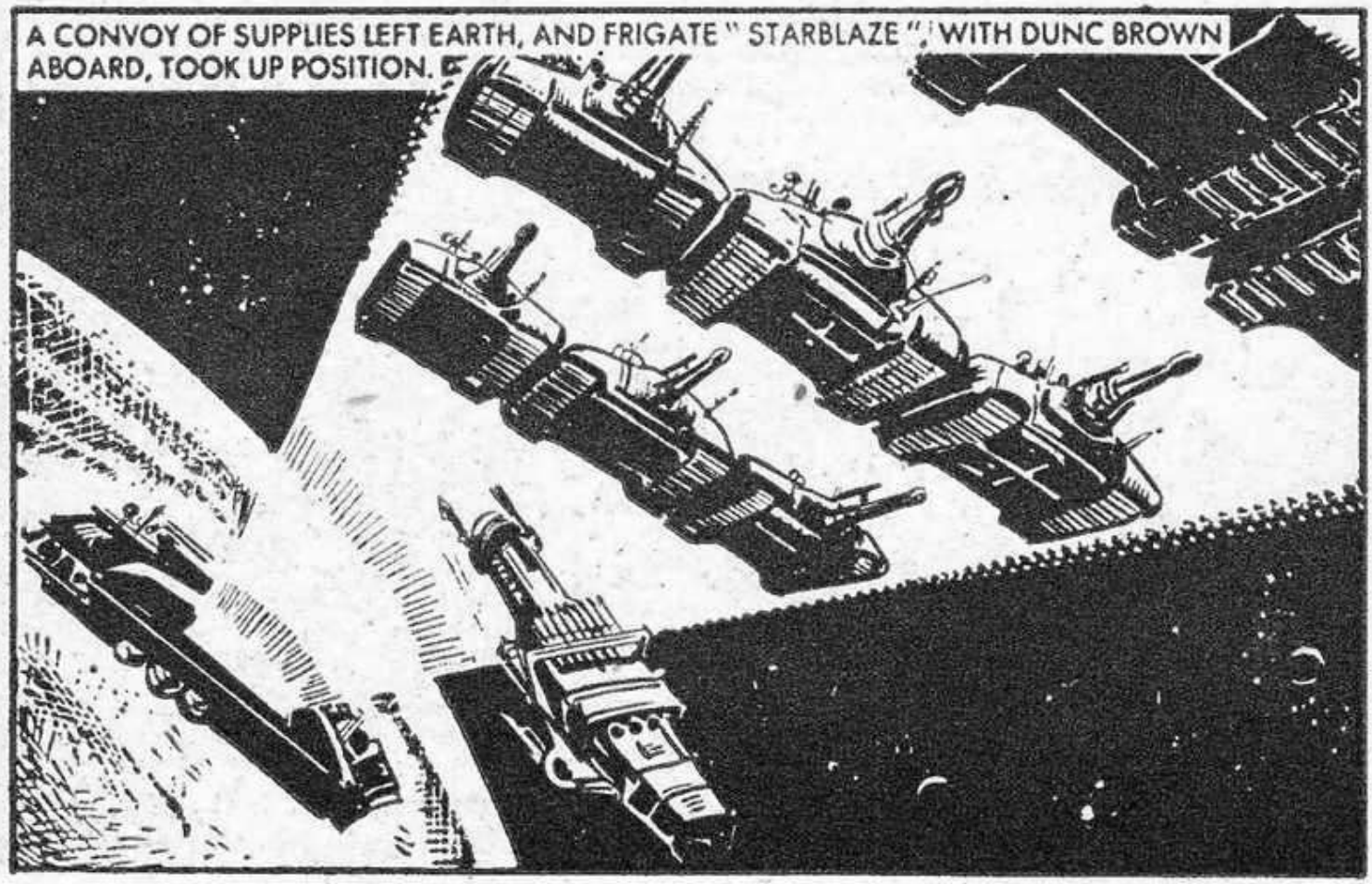
IN HIS COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE, COLONEL RIDD PREPARED TO WITHOLD A MASSIVE FAREET ATTACK.

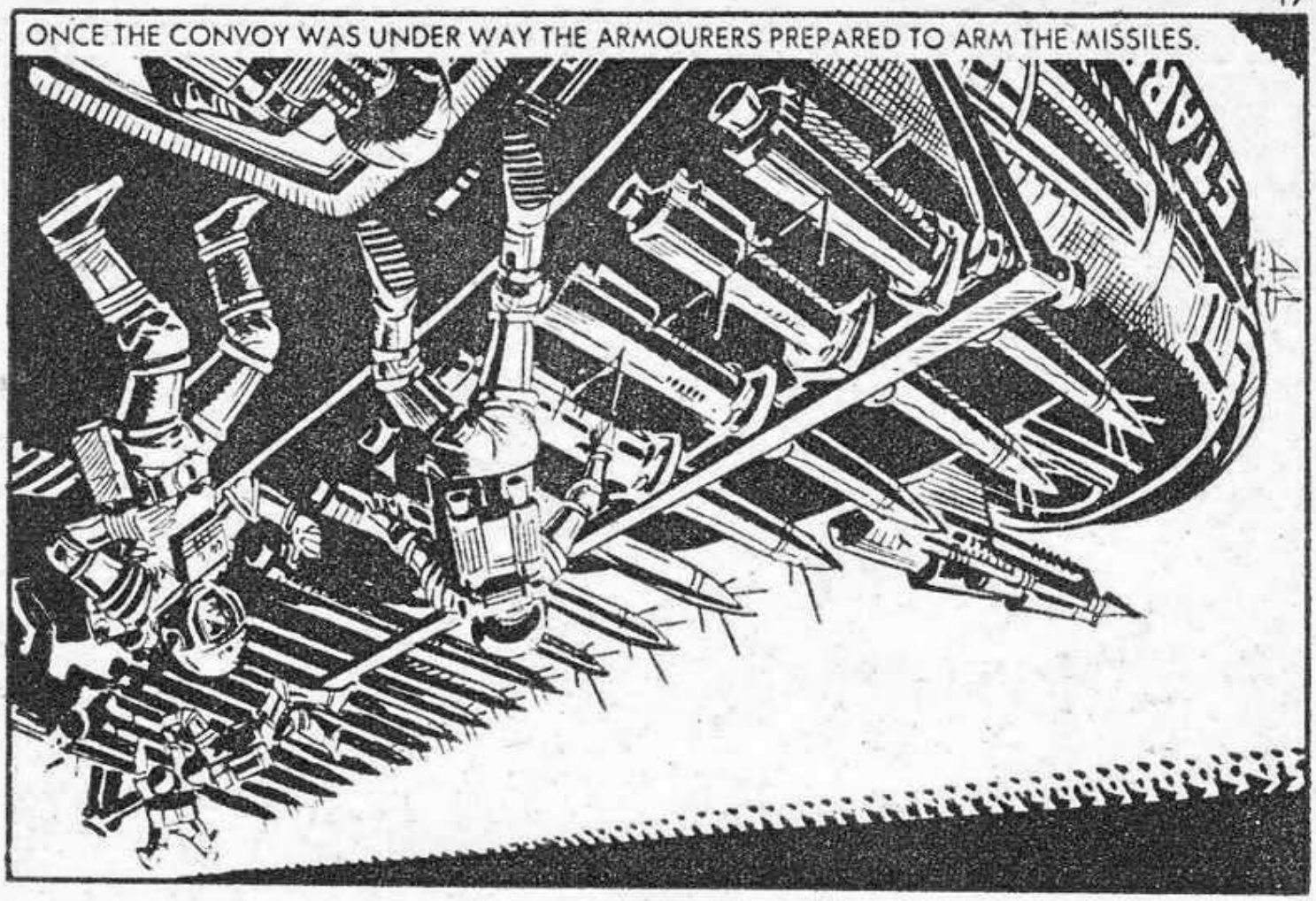


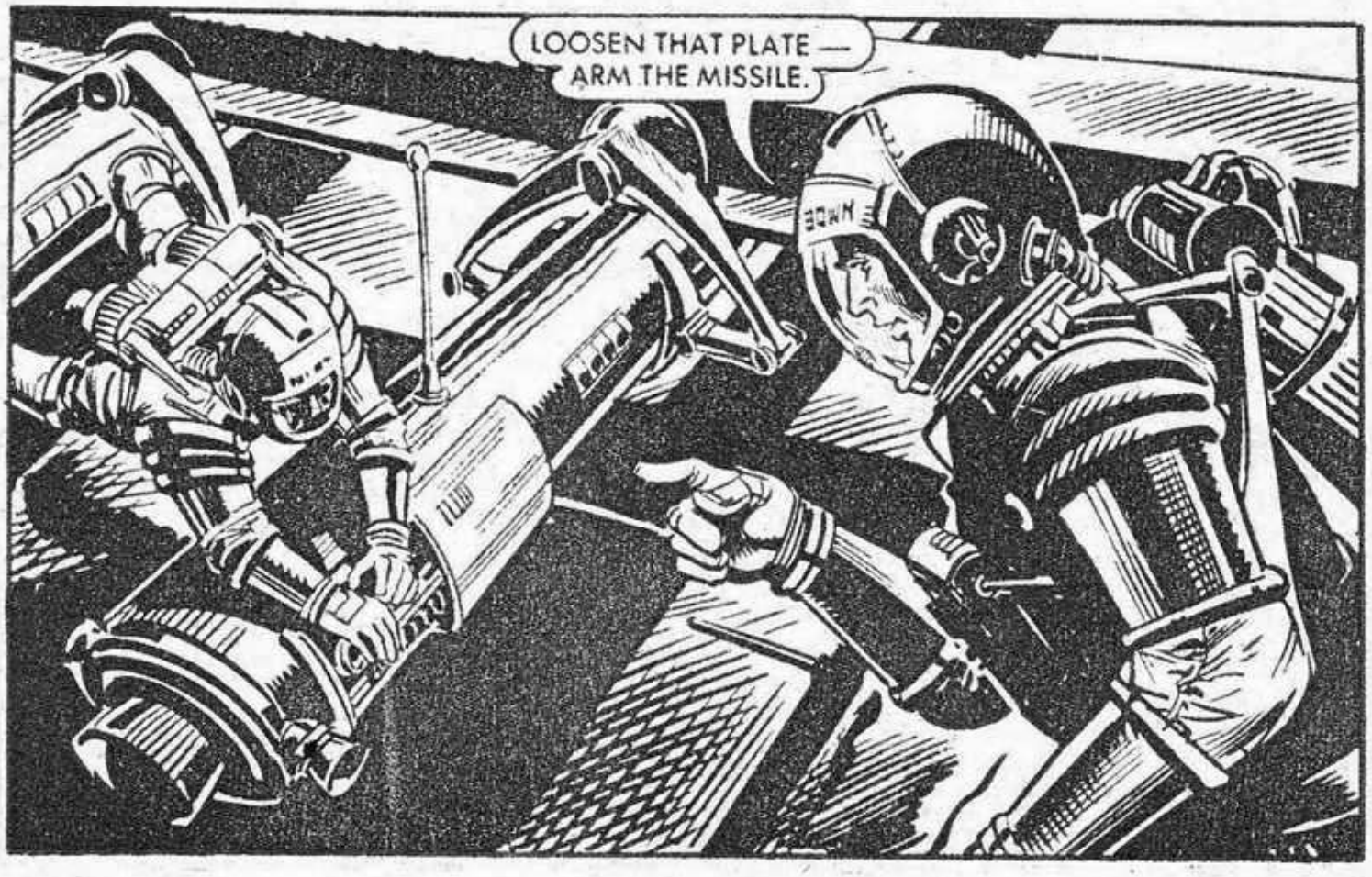
THIS TIME WE WILL FINISH THE TERRAN SCUM FOR EVER.

IN TERRAN HQ —
SENSORS GIVE A COUNT OF 10,000 TROOPS AND 2,000 VEHICLES IN THE DETONATION AREA.
THAT MEANS NEARLY THE ENTIRE FAREET SPEARHEAD. DETONATE!

THE THERMIC MINES EXPLODED — MELTING SOLID ROCK, AND THE GROUND TURNED TO A SEA OF WHITE HOT LAVA.

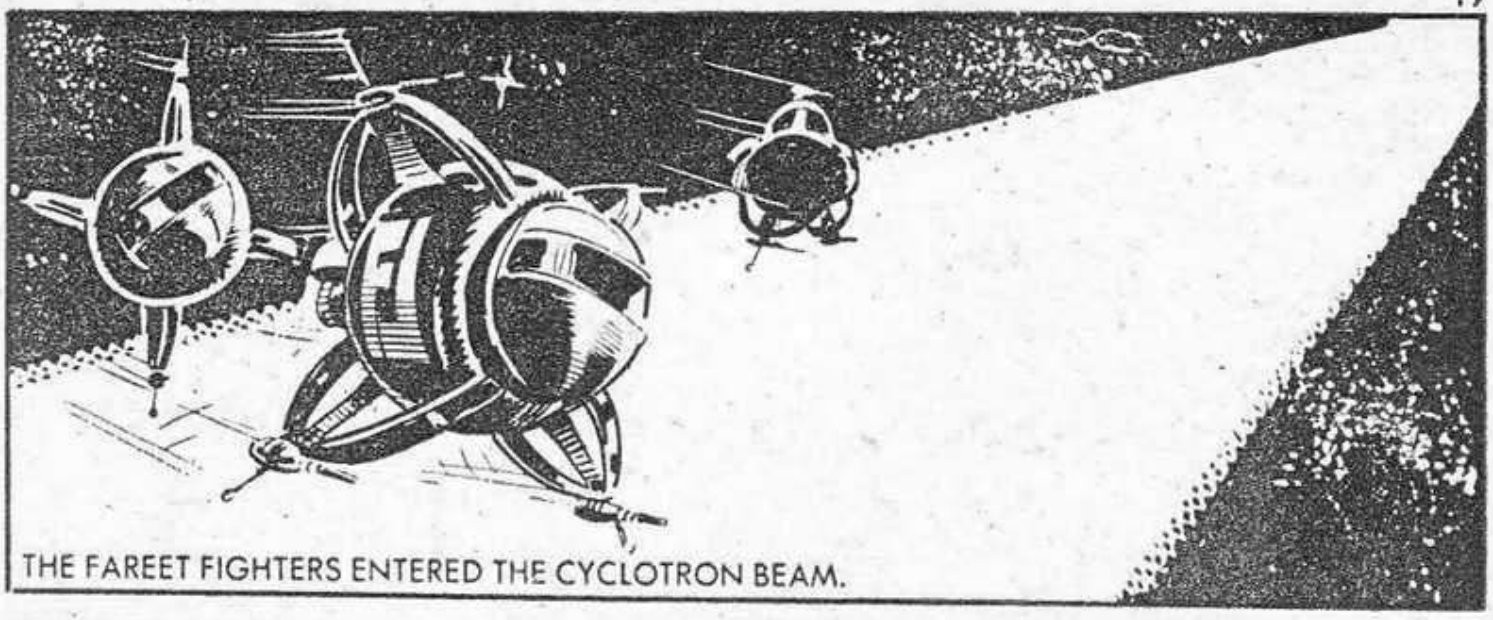

A CONVOY OF SUPPLIES LEFT EARTH, AND FRIGATE " STARBLAZE ", WITH DUNC BROWN ABOARD, TOOK UP POSITION.


ONCE THE CONVOY WAS UNDER WAY THE ARMOURERS PREPARED TO ARM THE MISSILES.


LOOSEN THAT PLATE — ARM THE MISSILE.

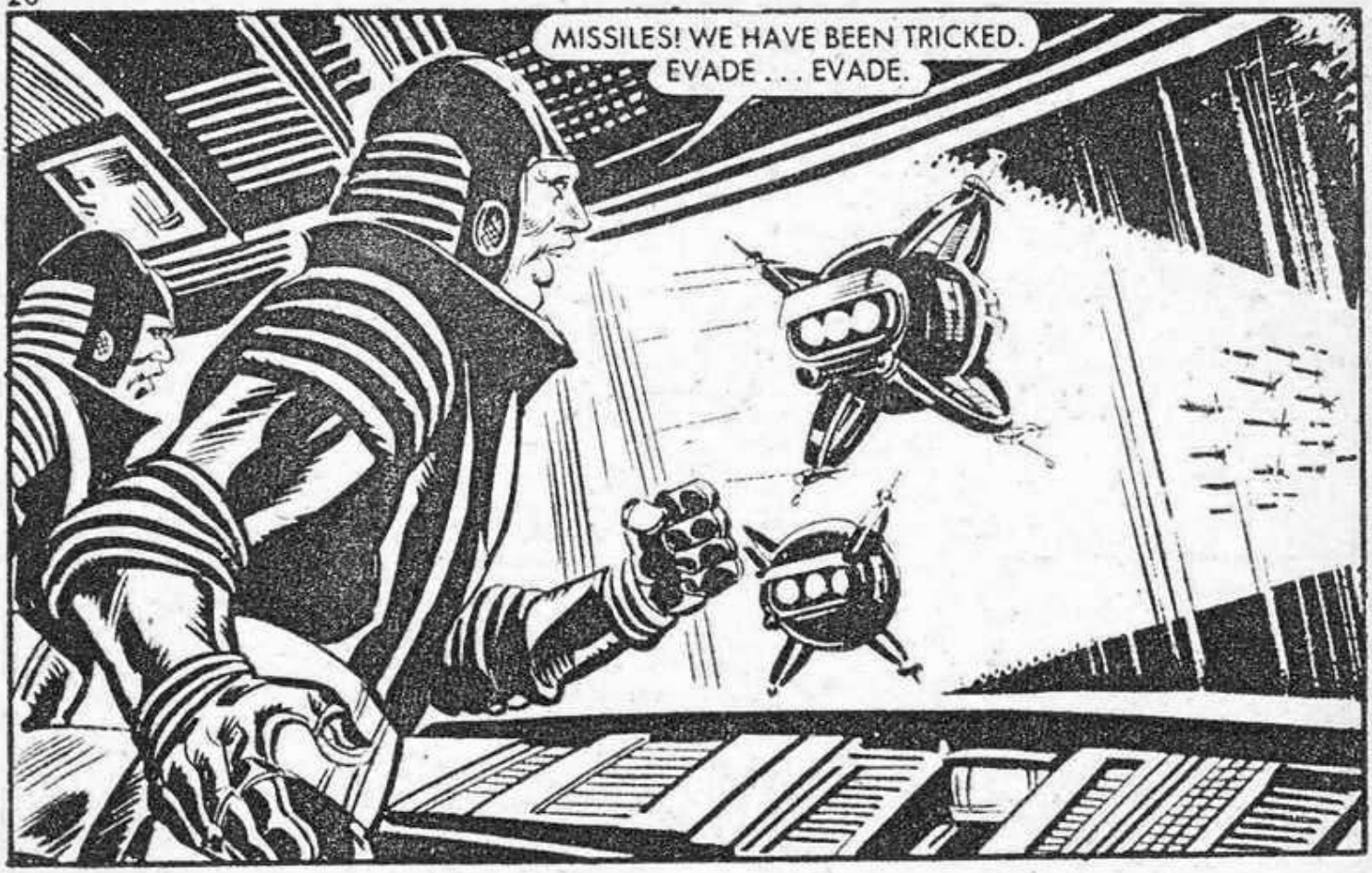
ON THULE, GANNO MONITORED THE SITUATION.
THE TERRANS HAVE SLOWED OUR ADVANCE. IF THEY GET A CYCLOTRON BEAM CONVOY THROUGH INTACT, IT WILL BE SERIOUS FOR US.

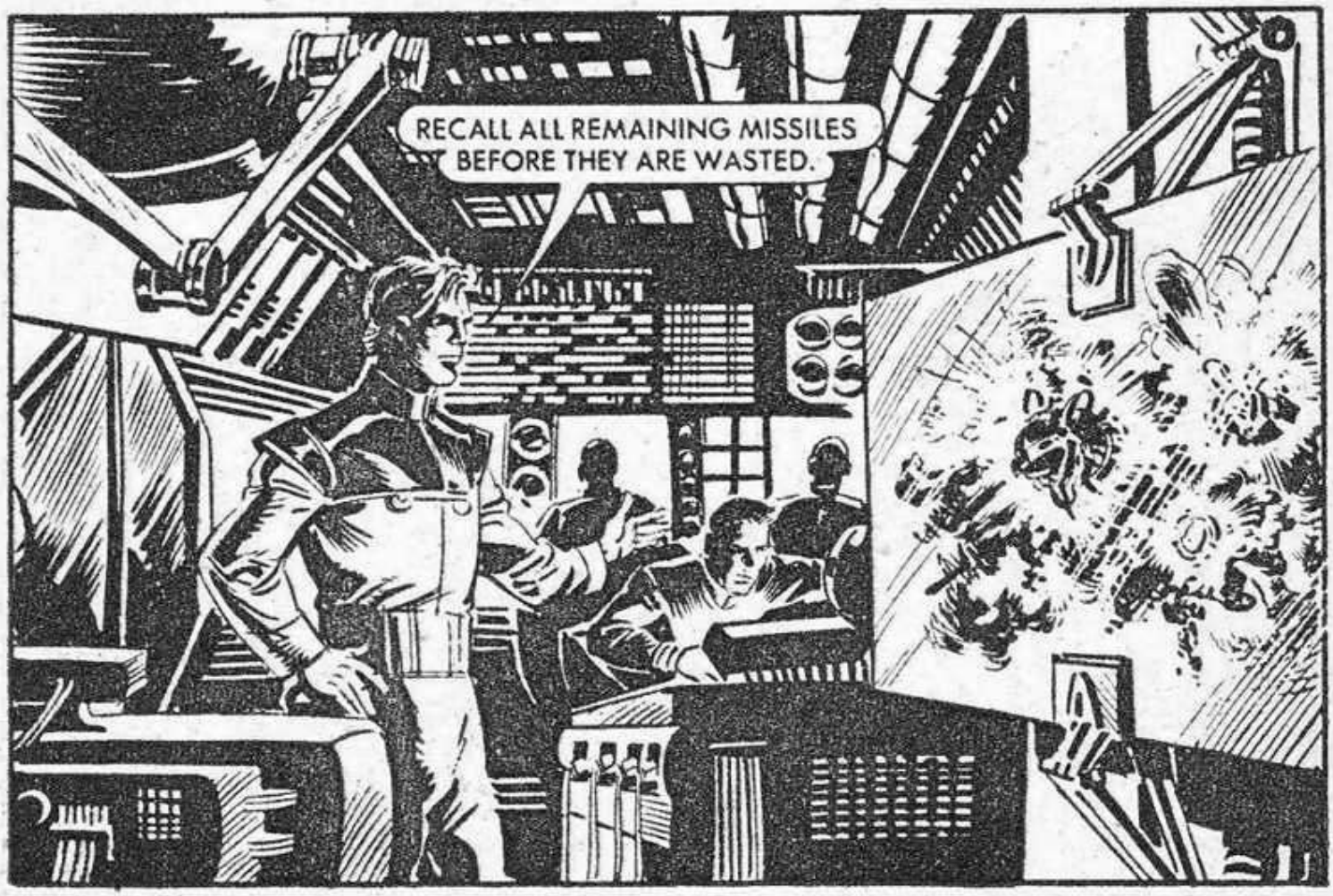
ALL FIGHTERS TO ACTION . . . DESTROY THE CONVOY.


THE FAREET FIGHTERS ENTERED THE CYCLOTRON BEAM.

THE TERRANS MUST BE DESPERATE, THEY HAVE NO ESCORT CRAFT.

BUT STARBLAZE WAS THERE, HIDDEN AMONGST SUPPLIES.
THEY HAVEN'T SPOTTED US YET. RANGE 071 . . . FIRE AT 065.


MISSILES! WE HAVE BEEN TRICKED.
EVADE . . . EVADE.


RECALL ALL REMAINING MISSILES
BEFORE THEY ARE WASTED.

A SCRAMBLER MESSAGE FROM THULE DEPOT— IT MUST BE COMMANDER RIDD.

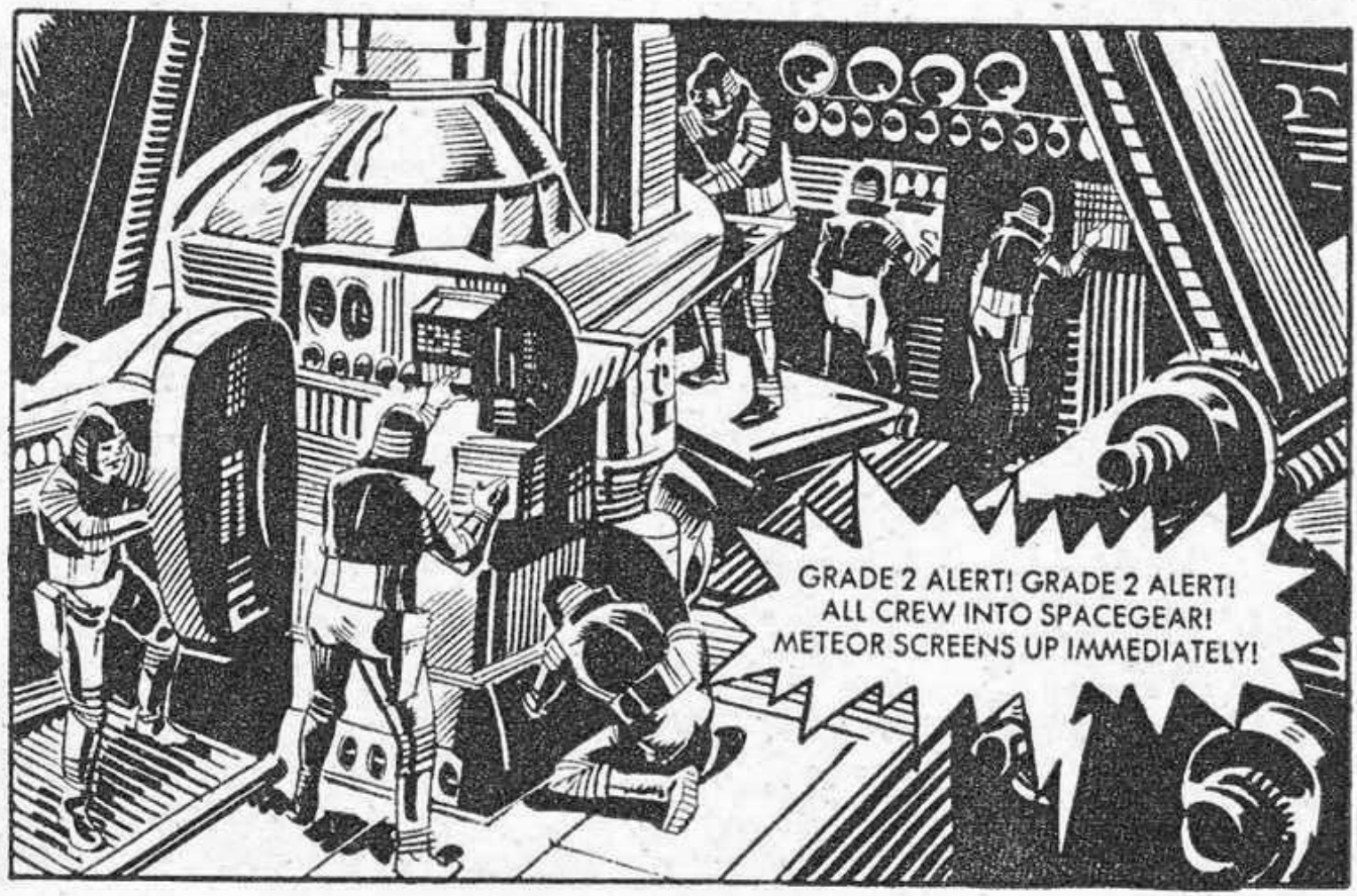
EVERY SHIP I CAN SPARE IS COMING UP TO PROTECT YOU ON THE RUN-IN. CONTROL OF ALL MISSILES IS TO BE SWITCHED TO MY SHIP'S INSTRUMENTATION. CONFIRM TO ME WHEN DONE.

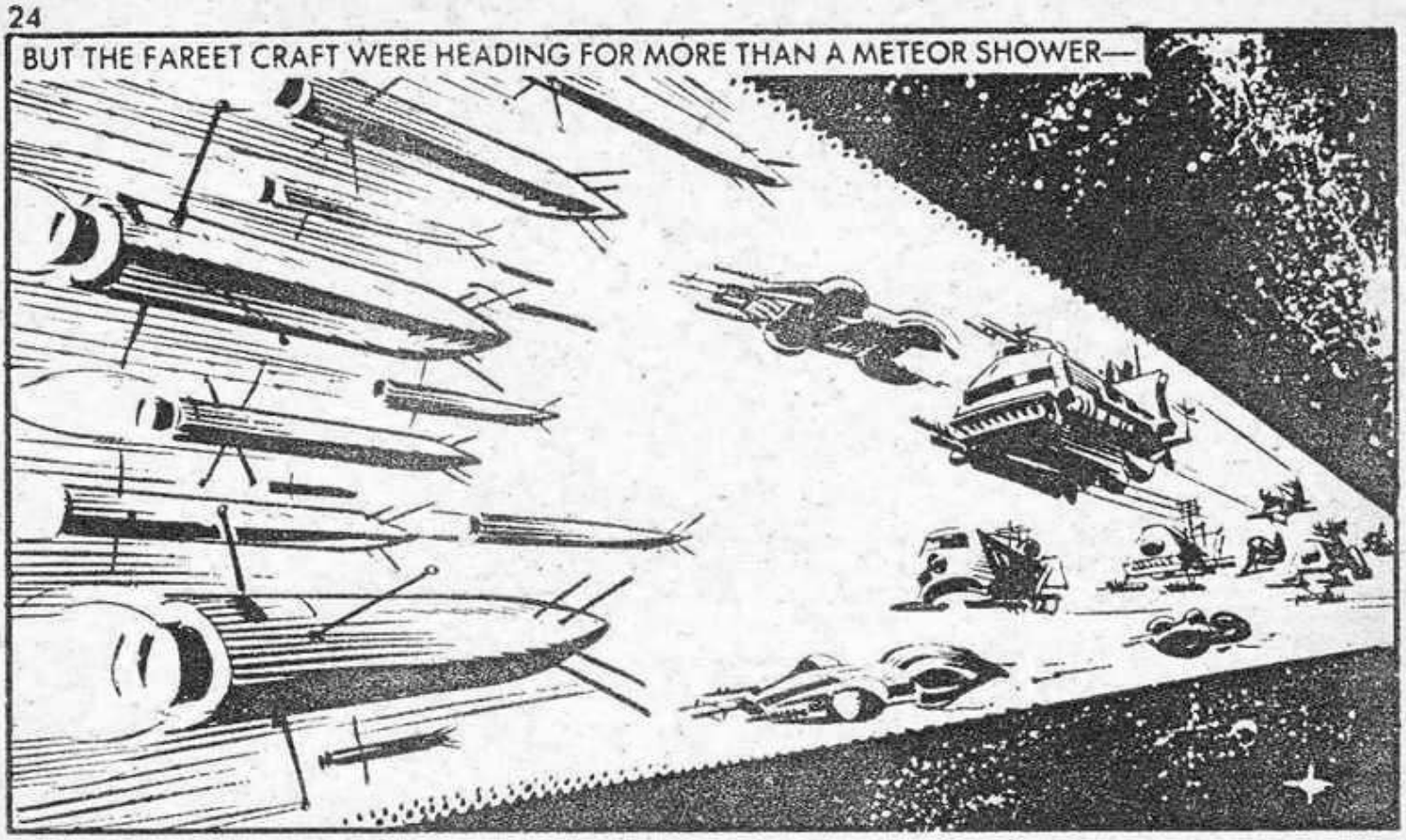
" POLESTAR ", RIDD'S COMMAND SHIP, TOOK OVER THE MISSILE CONTROL.
" STARBLAZE ", WE HAVE CONTROL. MISSILES ACCEPTED AS NOW.

VANGUARD 1 TO POLESTAR . . . ENEMY FLEET AHEAD . . . RANGE 153.

FIRE MISSILES, GUNS . . . PROGRAMME TO IGNORE VANGUARD 1 AND SUPPLIES.

ON BOARD THE FAREET COMMAND SHIP—
WHAT IS IT? TOO SMALL FOR FIGHTING SHIPS.
MUST BE A METEOR SHOWER.


GRADE 2 ALERT! GRADE 2 ALERT! ALL CREW INTO SPACEGEAR! METEOR SCREENS UP IMMEDIATELY!


BUT THE FAREET CRAFT WERE HEADING FOR MORE THAN A METEOR SHOWER—

MEGASSAH! THOSE AREN'T METEORITES— THEY'RE MISSLES. GET OUT OF THE BEAM.

THE MISSILE SHOWER FULFILLED ITS PURPOSE.

WITH THE FAREET SQUADRON DESTROYED THE UNEXPENDED MISSILES WERE RECALLED.

ALL SHIPS DESTROYED. THE BEAM IS FREE OF TROUBLE.

ON THULE, GANNO PLANNED A COUNTERSTRIKE.
THAT BEAM COULD PUT THE EARTHLINGS ON TOP FAIRLY SOON.
WE HAVE MET A DISASTER, BUT OUR ARMY IS STILL STRONGER THAN THEIRS.

SEND IN OUR ENTIRE ARMY—BEAM SUPPLIES WON'T HELP DEAD HUMANS.

THE TERRAN-SPACEFLEET HAD TO RETURN TO EARTH FOR FUEL, AND RIDD WAS ORDERED TO TAKE COMMAND OF THULE'S DEFENCE.

THAT'S THE SIXTH AREA WE'VE NOTED TROOP MOVEMENTS. IT ALL ADDS UP TO THE SIMPLE FACT THAT WE ARE OUTNUMBERED.

CAN WE HOLD OUT UNTIL FURTHER RESOURCES ARE BEAMED IN TO PUT US ON TOP?

NO! WE MUST ATTACK NOW. WE MUST DELAY THEIR OFFENSIVE.

EARTH'S MEAGRE ARMY ON THULE WAS ORDERED FORWARD.
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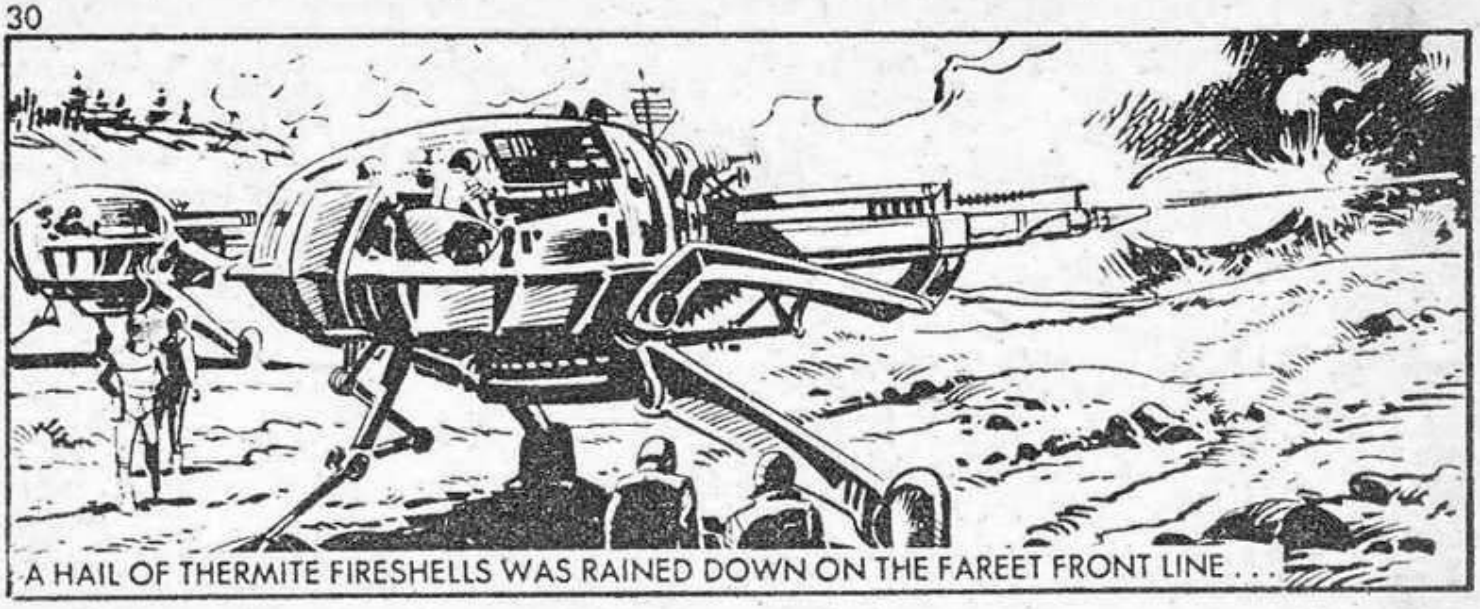
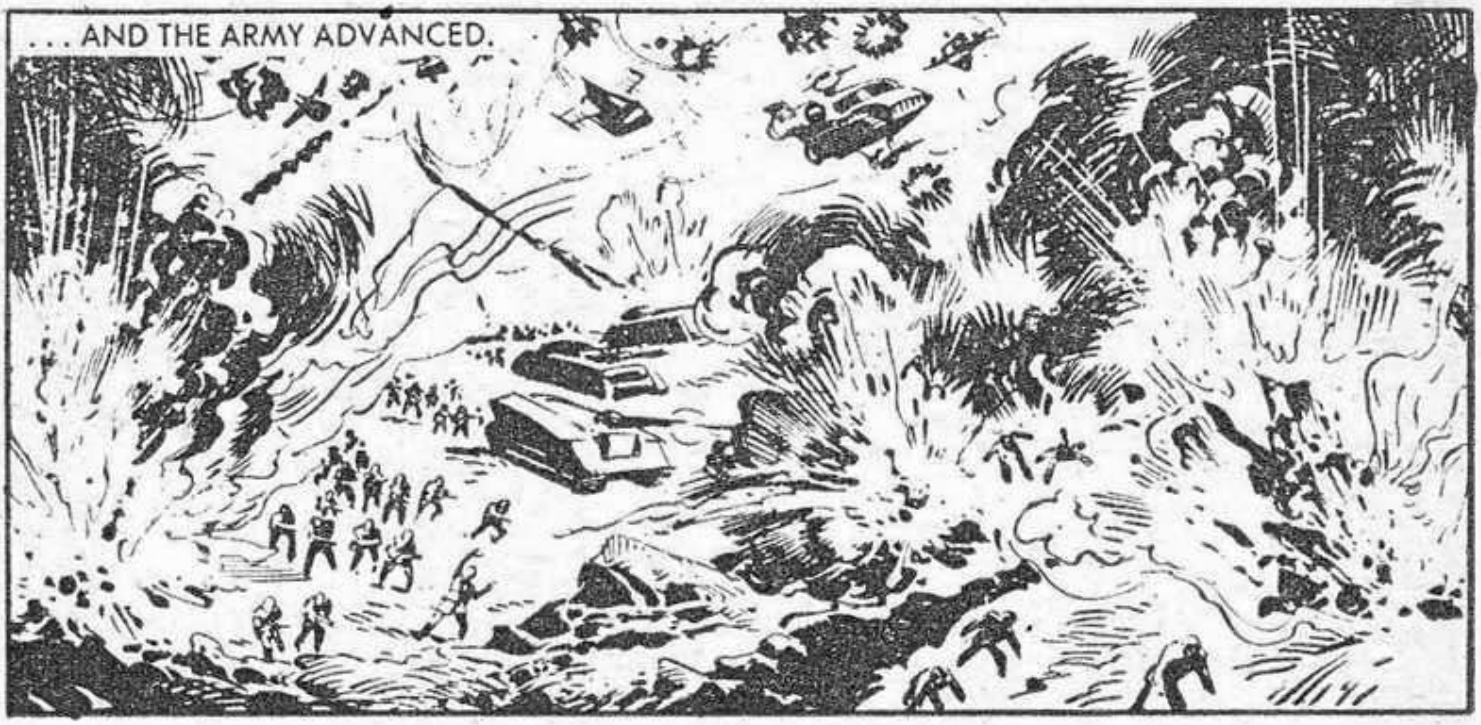
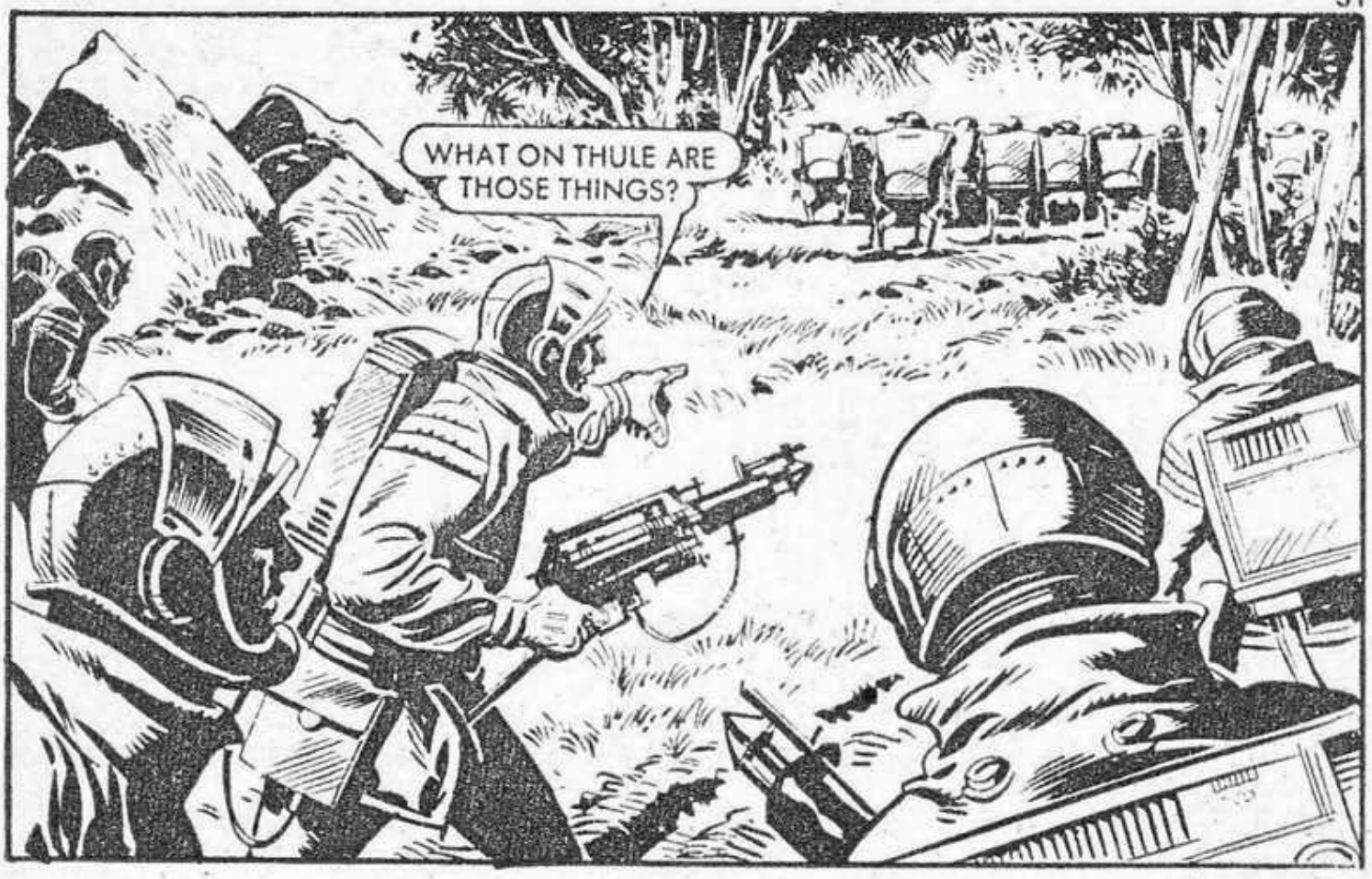
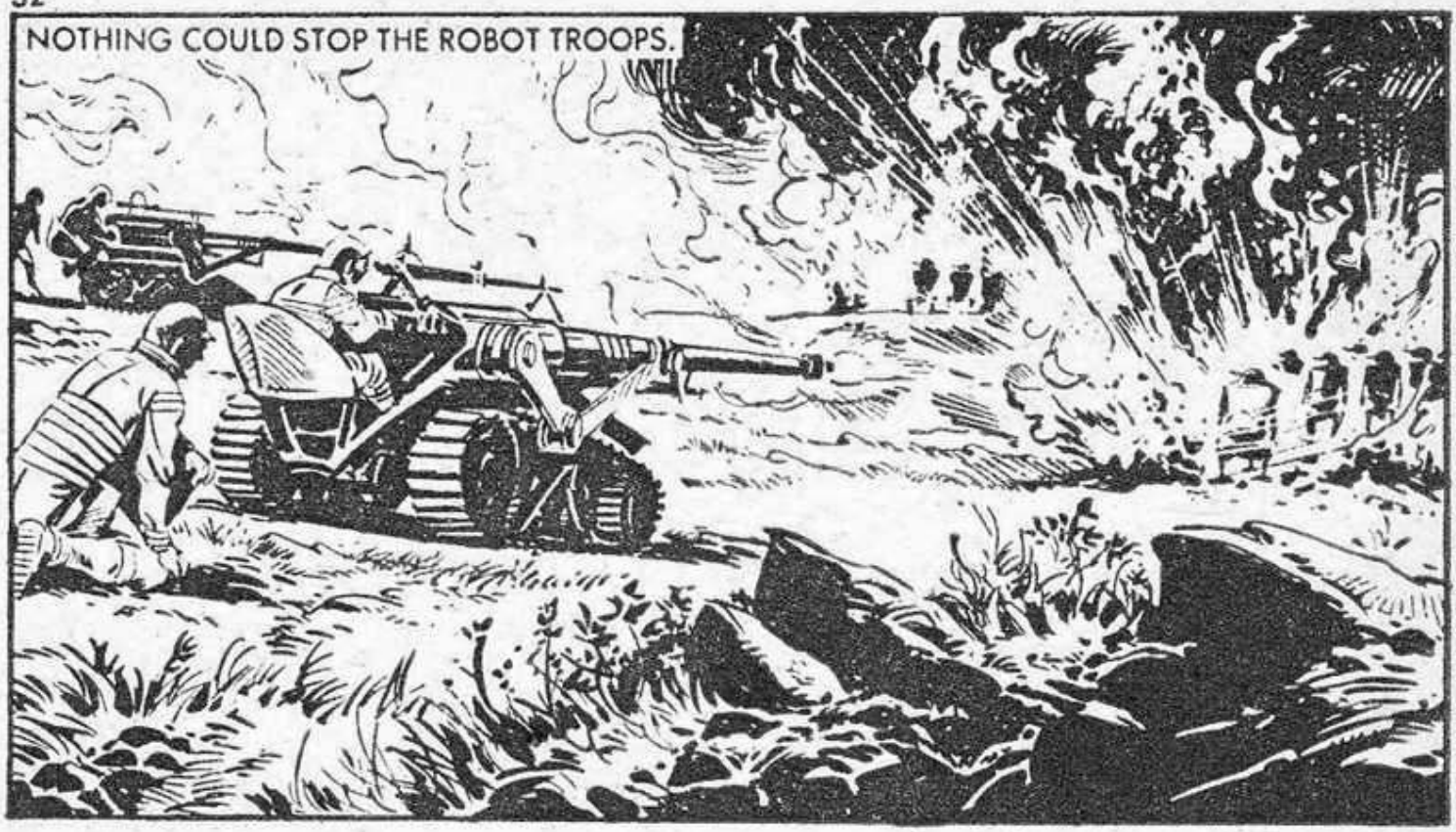

A HAIL OF THERMITE FIRESHELLS WAS RAINED DOWN ON THE FAREET FRONT LINE . . .


. . . AND THE ARMY ADVANCED.

RIDD'S FORCES EXPLOITED A BREAKTHROUGH.

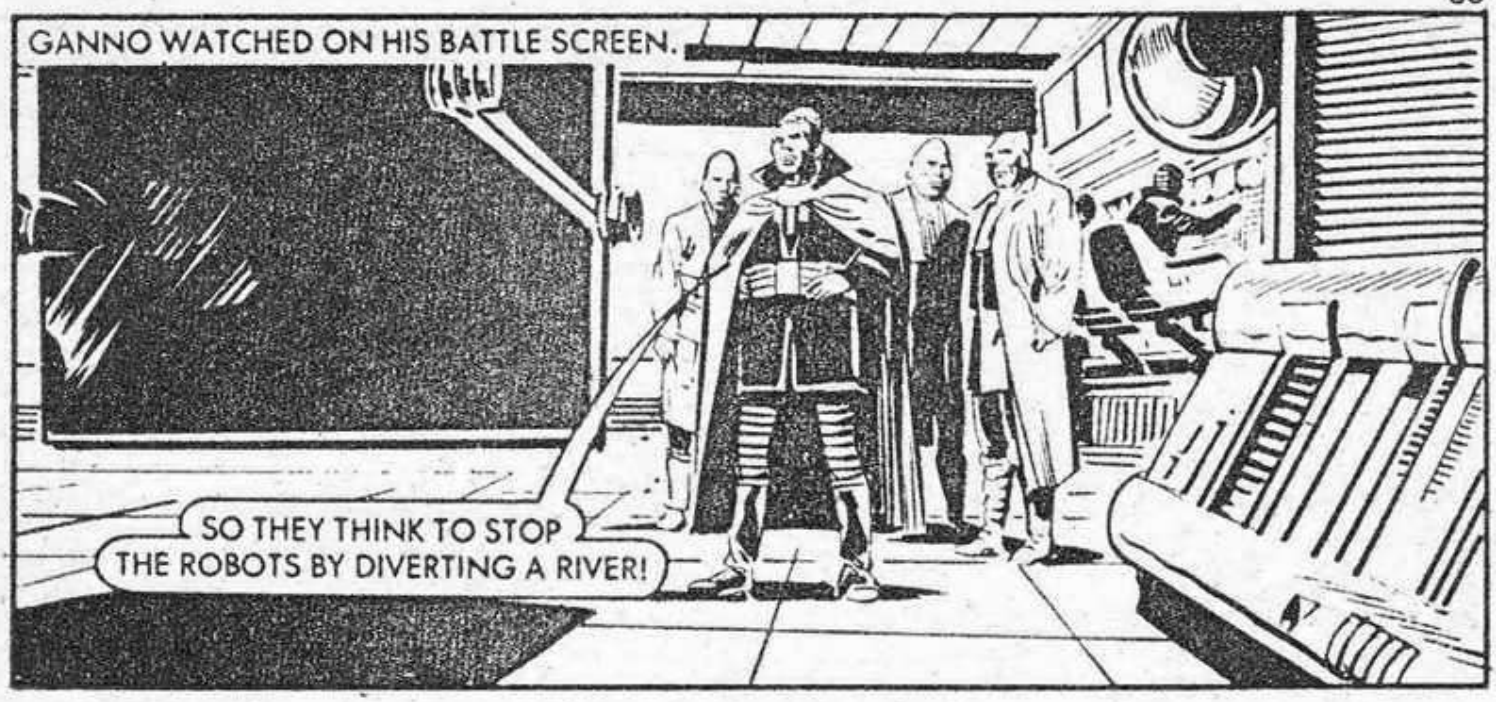

WHAT ON THULE ARE THOSE THINGS?

ROBOT TROOPS. GET OUT OF HERE! LASERS HAVE NO EFFECT.
GET SOME ANTI-PERSONNEL WEAPONS UP HERE—NOT LASER RIFLES —THEY'RE USELESS.


NOTHING COULD STOP THE ROBOT TROOPS.

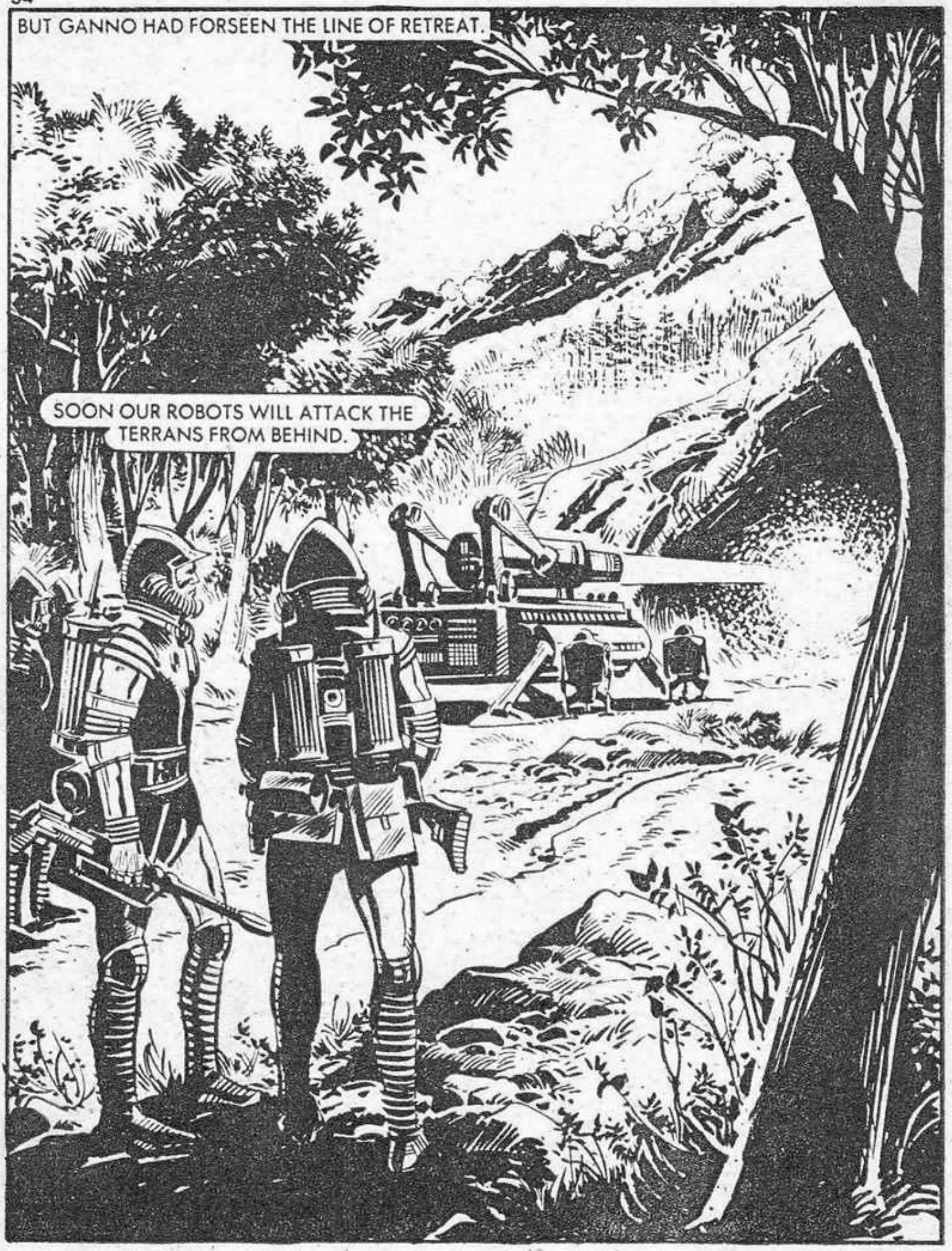
THE EARTH ARMY WAS FORCED INTO RETREAT.

A LAST DESPERATE ATTEMPT WAS MADE TO HALT THE ROBOTS—WITH THULE WATER.


GANNO WATCHED ON HIS BATTLE SCREEN.
SO THEY THINK TO STOP THE ROBOTS BY DIVERTING A RIVER!

THE DAM WAS BREACHED AND WATER SWEPT DOWN.
THEY'RE STILL MOVING ON.

THE TERRAN ARMY CONTINUED ITS RETREAT.
WE'VE RETREATED A LONG WAY. WE MUST STABALISE A LINE ALONG THE MOUNTAIN RIDGE. IT'S THE LAST DEFENSIVE POSITION.


BUT GANNO HAD FORSEEN THE LINE OF RETREAT.
SOON OUR ROBOTS WILL ATTACK THE TERRANS FROM BEHIND.

AT EARTH'S THULE GROUND CONTROL —
WE HAVE TO NEUTRALISE THE ROBOTS OR THEY WILL FINISH US.
THE CYCLOTRON BEAM IS THE ONE BIT OF TECHNOLOGY WE HAVE WHICH THEY DON'T.

DO YOU HAVE TECHNICIANS AND EQUIPMENT TO DEFLECT THE THULE END OF THE BEAM ONTO THE ROBOTS WHILE THEY ARE CONCENTRATED IN ONE AREA?
YES . . . BUT WHAT DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?

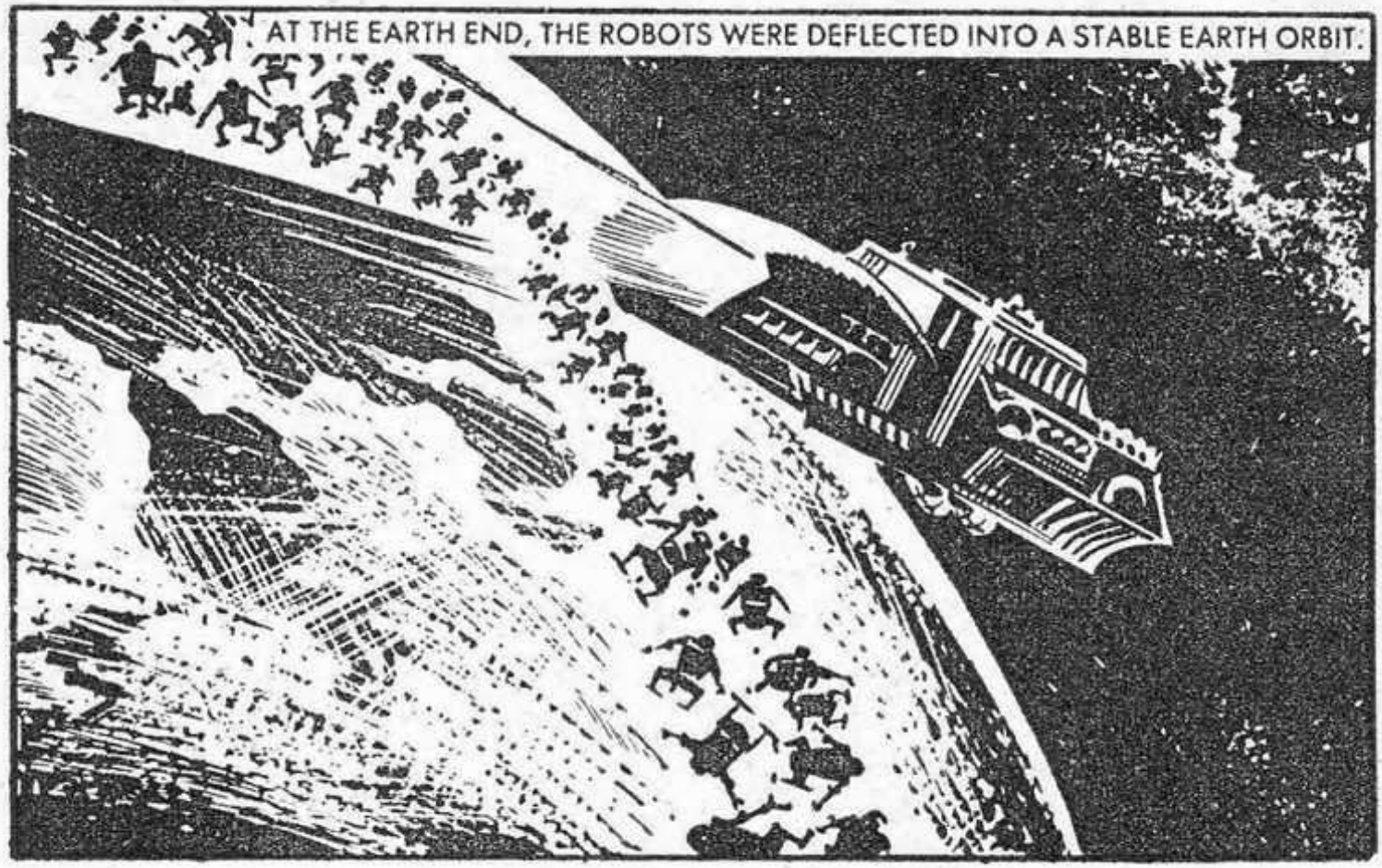
MY IDEA WAS TO SEND MISSILES DOWN THE BEAM—STRAIGHT ONTO THE ROBOT CONCENTRATION!
IT WON'T WORK. THEIR GROUND INSTALLATIONS CAN DEFLECT OR DESTROY MISSILES REGARDLESS OF SPEED OR DIRECTION.

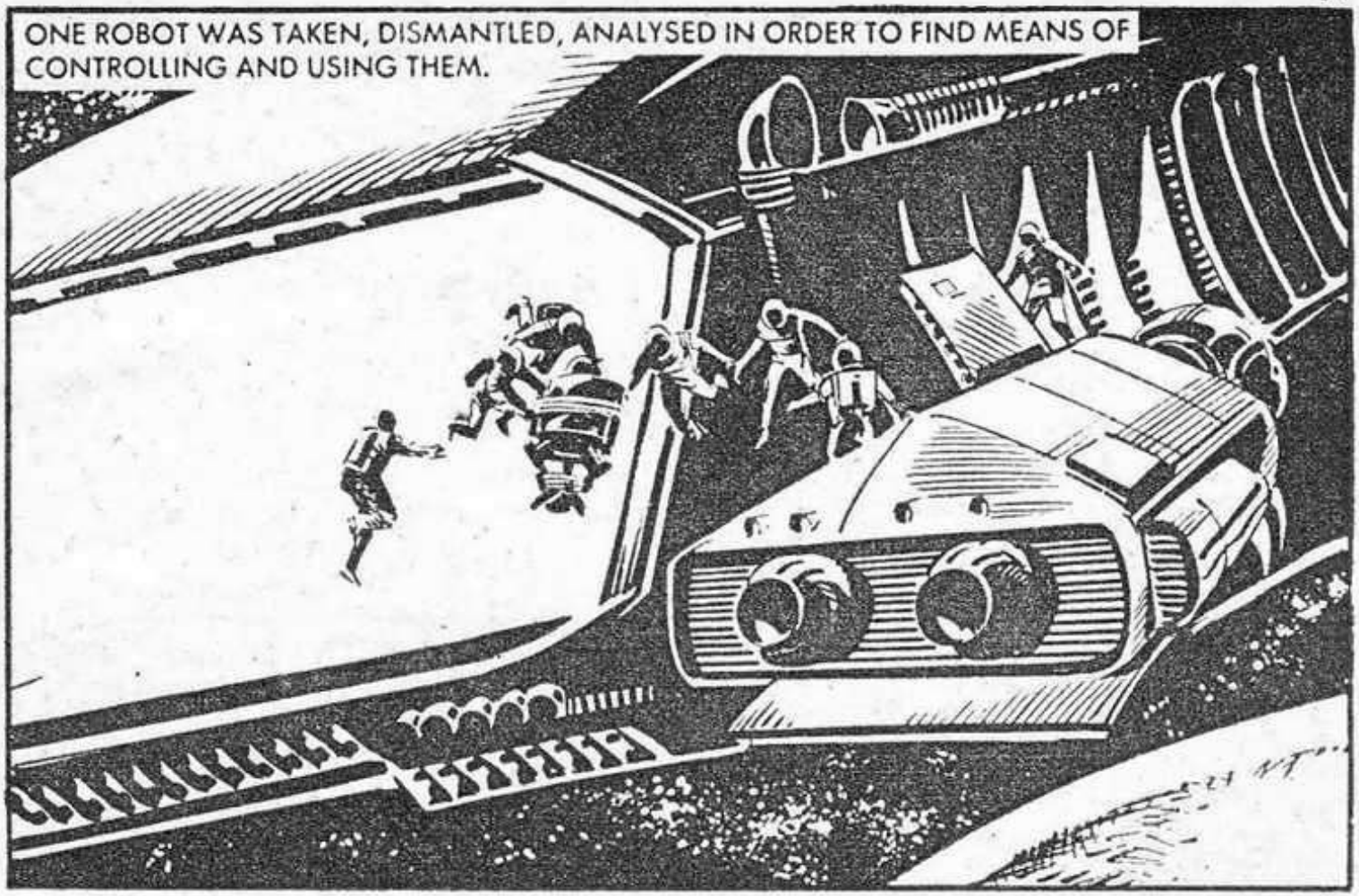
THE BEAM HAS TO BE THE ANSWER.

ANDROMEDA! I'VE GOT IT! REVERSE THE BEAM.

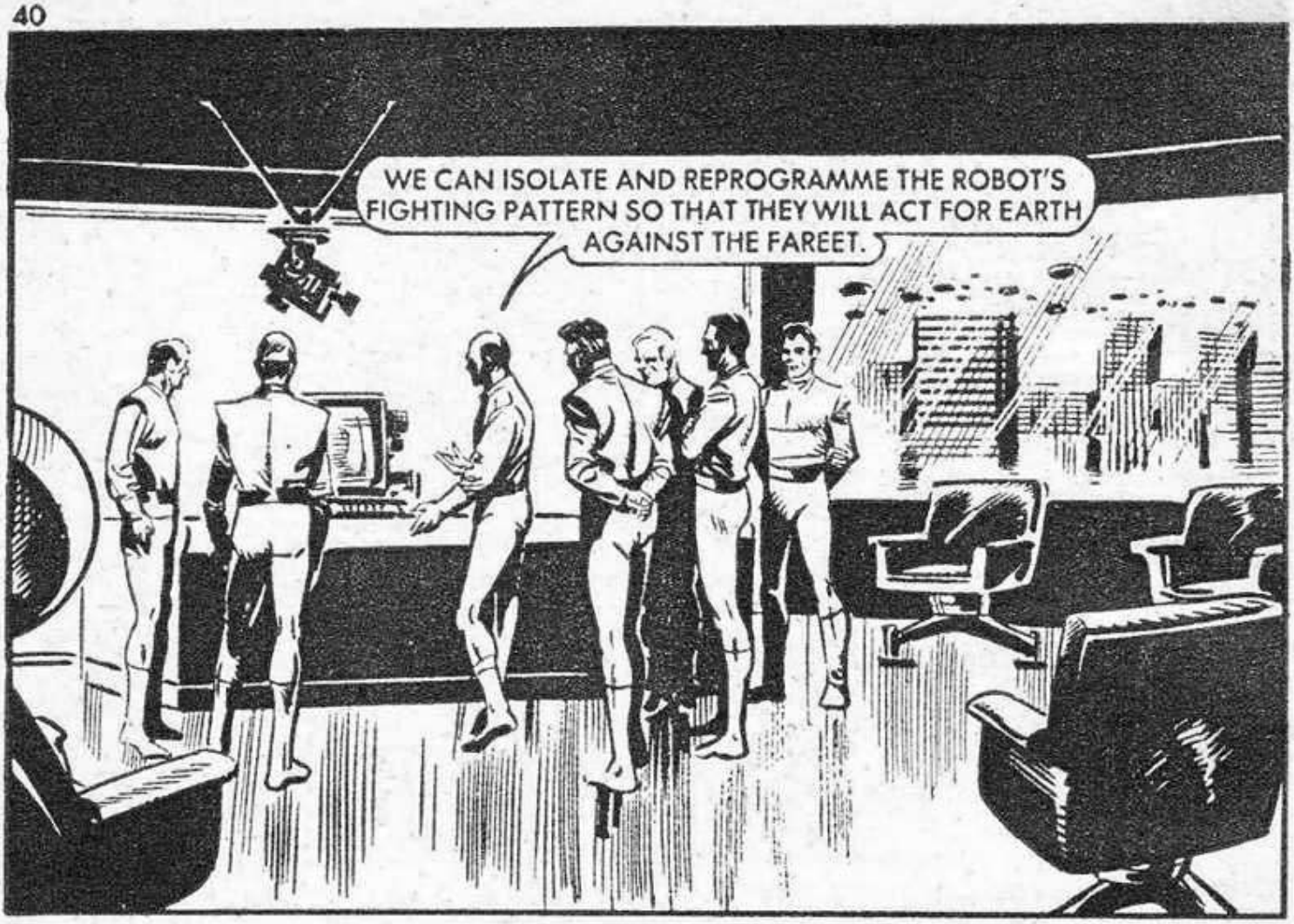
THE BEAM WAS QUICKLY DEFLECTED ONTO THE ROBOT POSITION AND REVERSED—IT ACTED LIKE A COLOSSAL VACUUM CLEANER.

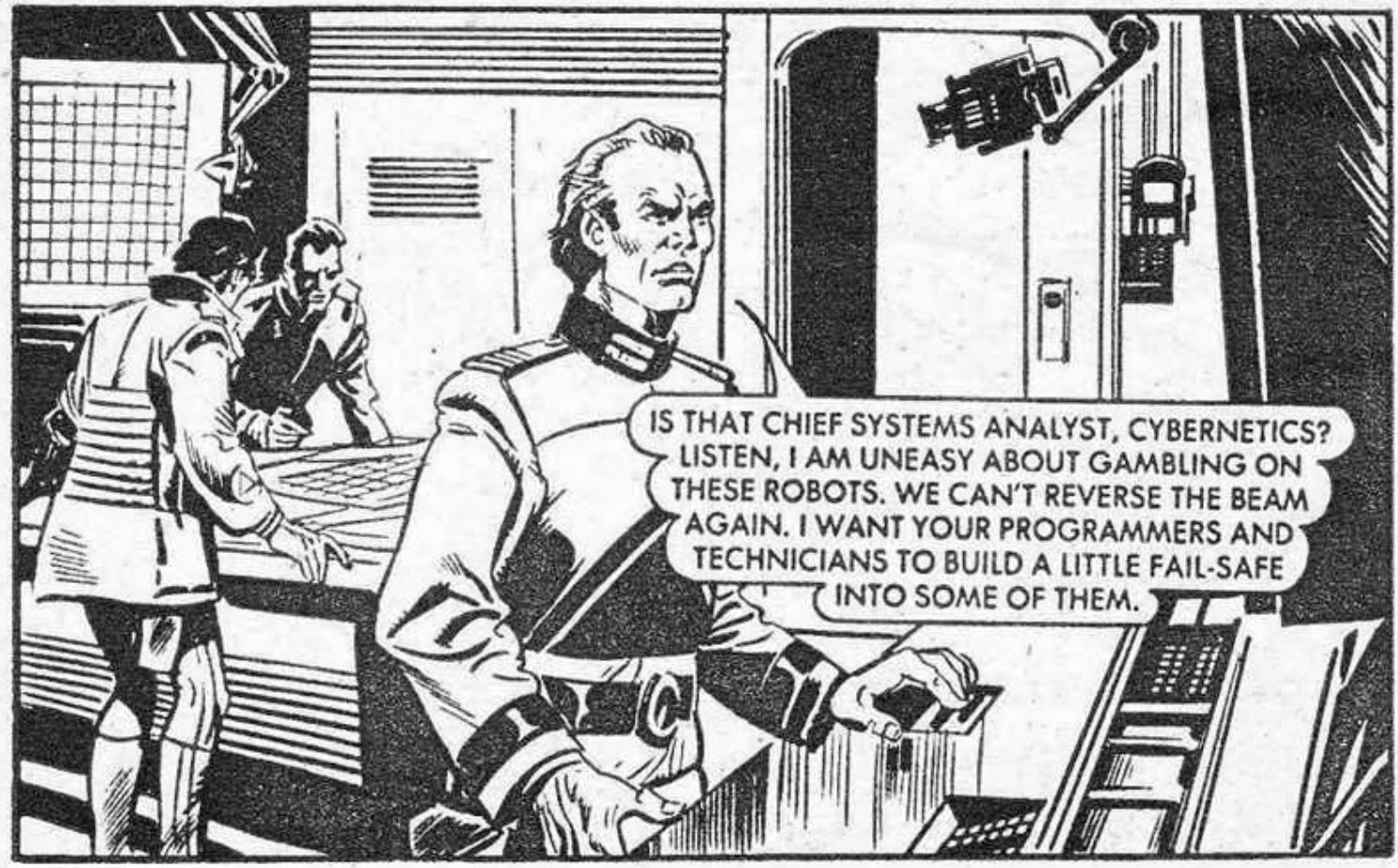
THE ROBOTS WERE PULLED ALONG THE BEAM AT LIGHT SPEED.

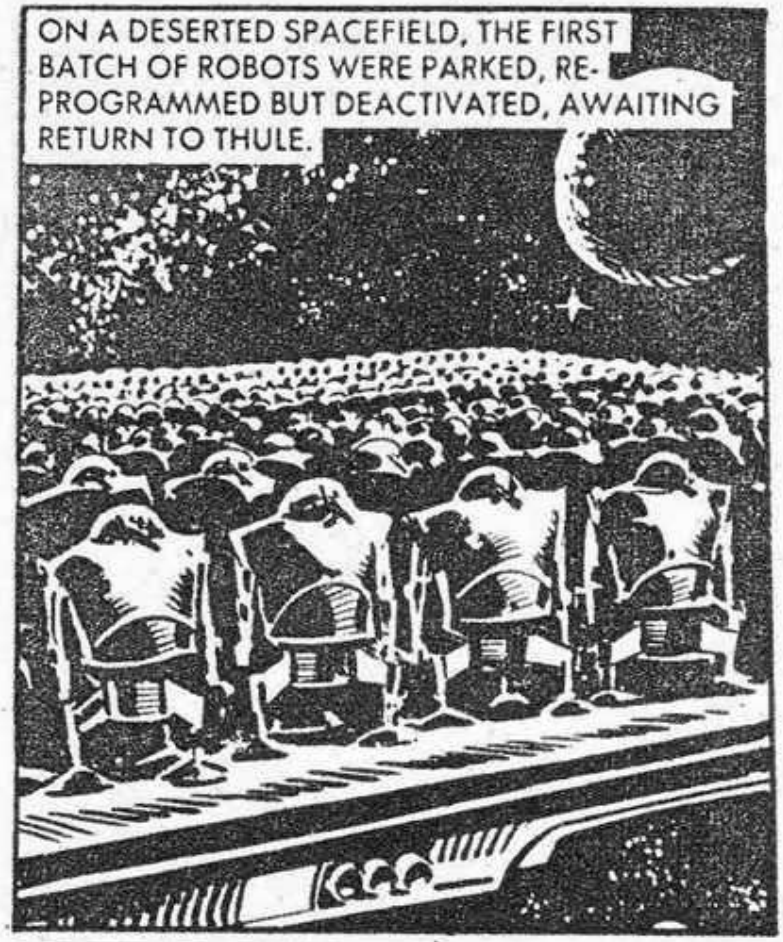

AT THE EARTH END, THE ROBOTS WERE DEFLECTED INTO A STABLE EARTH ORBIT.

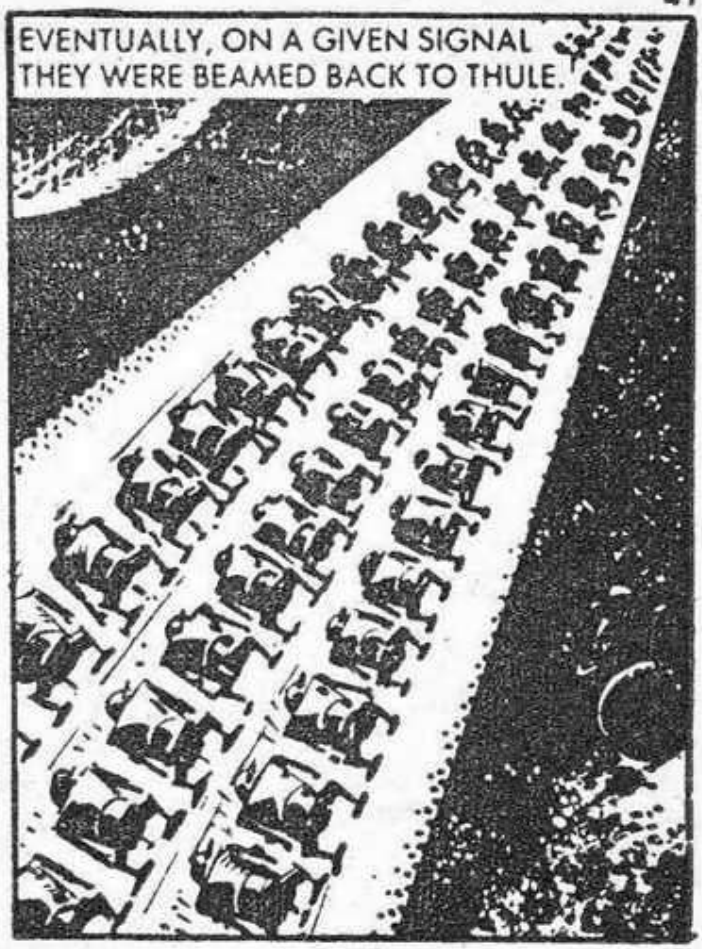

ONE ROBOT WAS TAKEN, DISMANTLED, ANALYSED IN ORDER TO FIND MEANS OF CONTROLLING AND USING THEM.

IN THE LABORATORY, THE ROBOT BRAIN WAS FOUND TO BE A SILICON BLOCK WITH TENS OF THOUSANDS OF IMPRINTED CIRCUITS.


WE CAN ISOLATE AND REPROGRAMME THE ROBOT'S FIGHTING PATTERN SO THAT THEY WILL ACT FOR EARTH AGAINST THE FAREET.


IS THAT CHIEF SYSTEMS ANALYST, CYBERNETICS? LISTEN, I AM UNEASY ABOUT GAMBLING ON THESE ROBOTS. WE CAN'T REVERSE THE BEAM AGAIN. I WANT YOUR PROGRAMMERS AND TECHNICIANS TO BUILD A LITTLE FAIL-SAFE INTO SOME OF THEM.


ON A DESERTED SPACEFIELD, THE FIRST BATCH OF ROBOTS WERE PARKED, RE-PROGRAMMED BUT DEACTIVATED, AWAITING RETURN TO THULE.


EVENTUALLY, ON A GIVEN SIGNAL THEY WERE BEAMED BACK TO THULE.

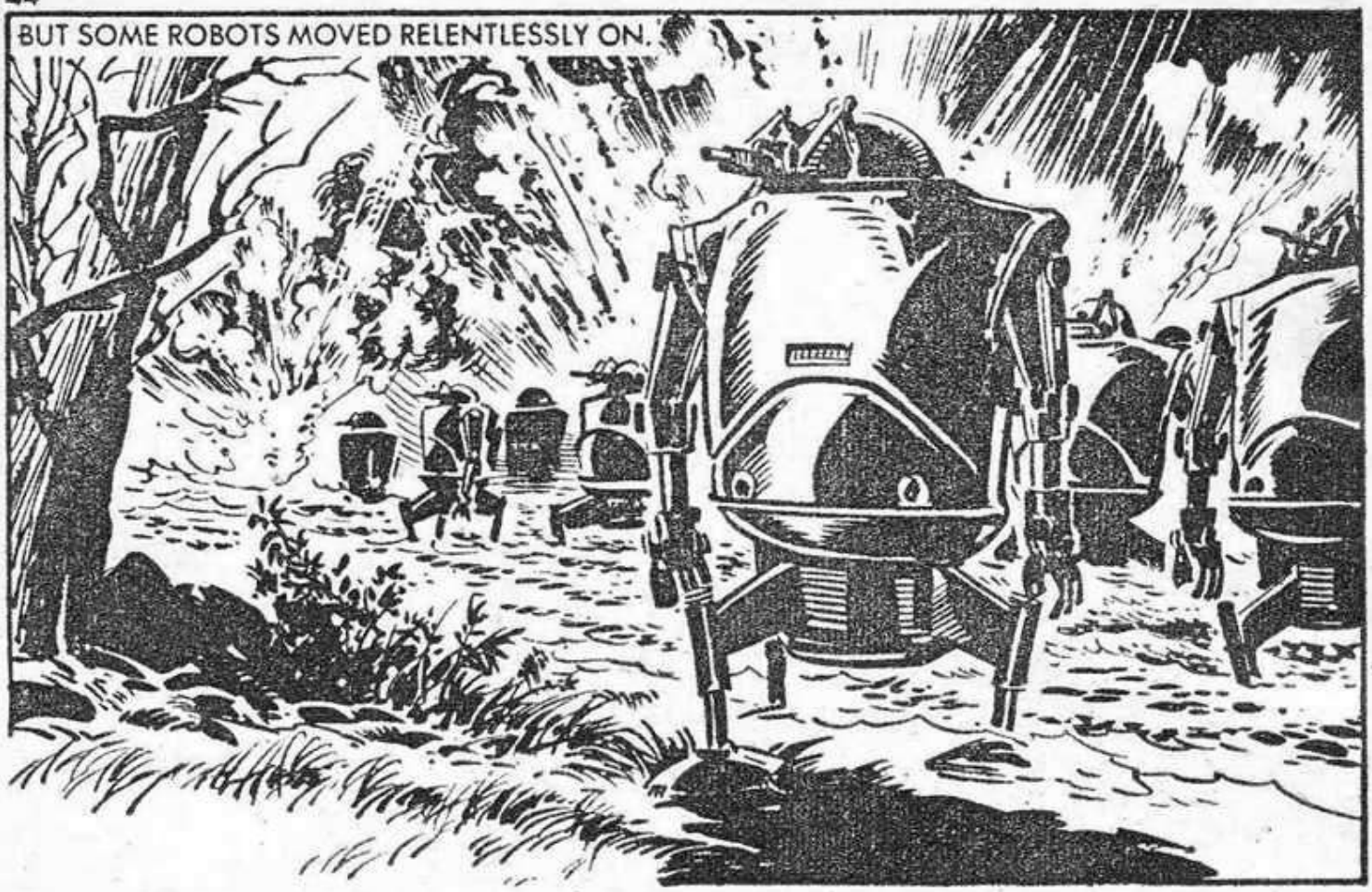
ON THULE, GANNO WAS MONITORING THE SITUATION.
I THINK IT LIKELY THAT THE HUMANS HAVE SUFFICIENT UNDERSTANDING TO TURN THE ROBOTS AGAINST US.
YOU CAN DEAL WITH THAT IF IT HAPPENS.
OH YES, WE NATURALLY HAVE THE FREQUENCIES FOR CHANGING ROBOTIC COMMANDS. THE EARTH CREATURES MAY BE IN FOR A NASTY SURPRISE—THE DE-PROGRAMMING SIGNAL HAS BEEN SENT.

THE ROBOT ARMY WAS ACTIVATED BY EARTH H.Q.

BUT THEY TURNED AGAINST THE EARTH TROOPS—
WHAT THE . . .

AT EARTH HQ —
THEY'RE ATTACKING! I GUESSED AS MUCH! OBVIOUSLY THE FAREET CAN DEPROGRAMME THE ROBOTS.

THE MOMENT THE FAREET SENT THE DEPROGRAMMING SIGNAL, A FAIL-SAFE DEVICE INSTALLED BY EARTH TECHNICIANS, TRIPPED THE SELF-DESTRUCT MECHANISM.


BUT SOME ROBOTS MOVED RELENTLESSLY ON.

MOVE IT FAST, BUT DON'T BREAK RANKS.
G.H.Q. SOME ROBOTS HAVE SELF DESTRUCTED BUT MOST HAVE TURNED ON US.

ONLY BY TURNING ALL AVAILABLE FIREPOWER ON THEM, DID THE HARD-PRESSED EARTH FORCE FINALLY STOP THE ROBOTS.
IT'S JUST AS WELL YOU DIDN'T TRUST THOSE ROBOTS.
WE'RE NO BETTER OFF—LOOK AT THAT FAREET BUILD UP.

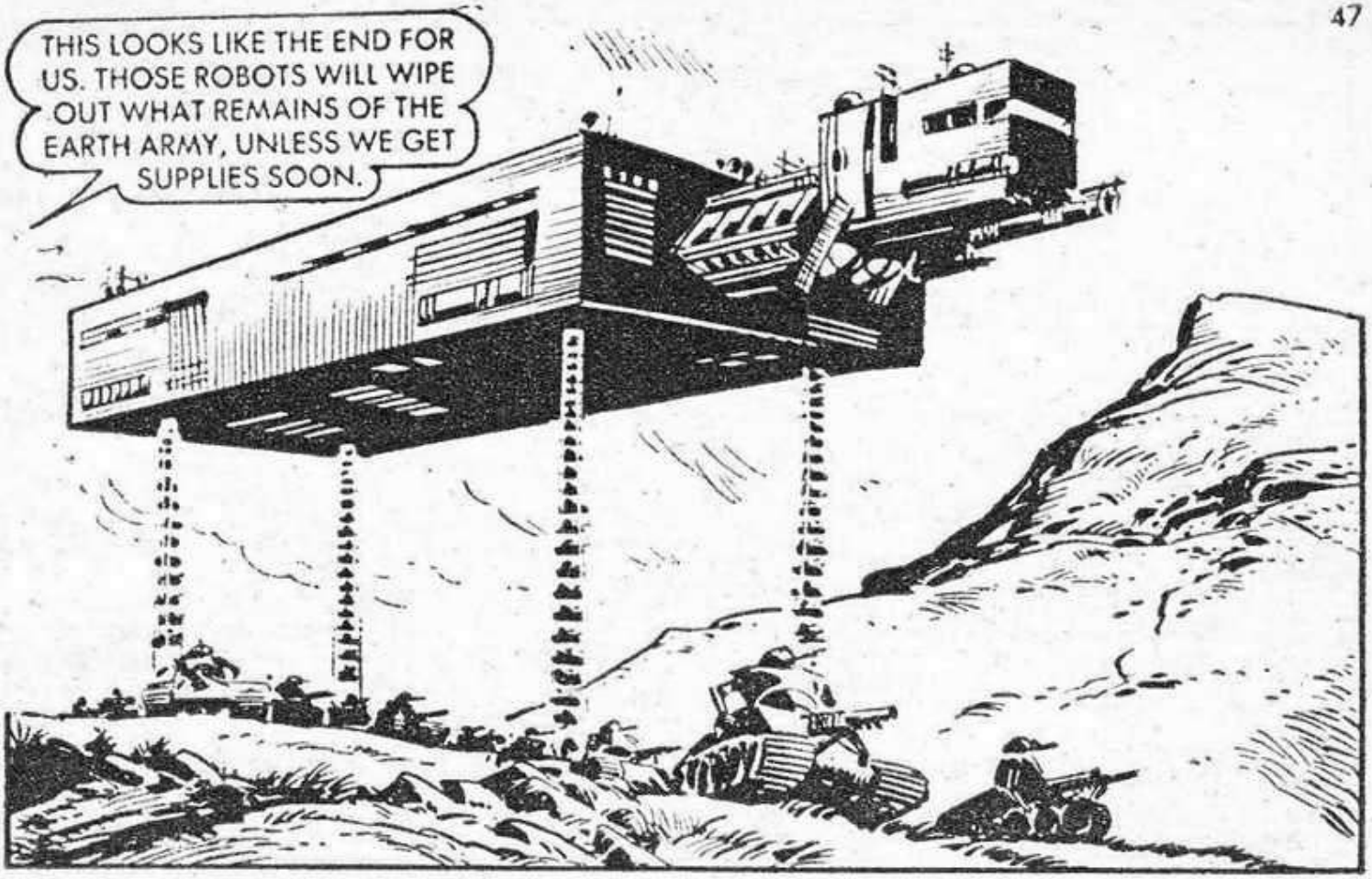
GANNO HAD PLANNED FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THAT PARTICULAR ROBOT ARMY.

SIR, THE FACTORY SHIP HAS ARRIVED.

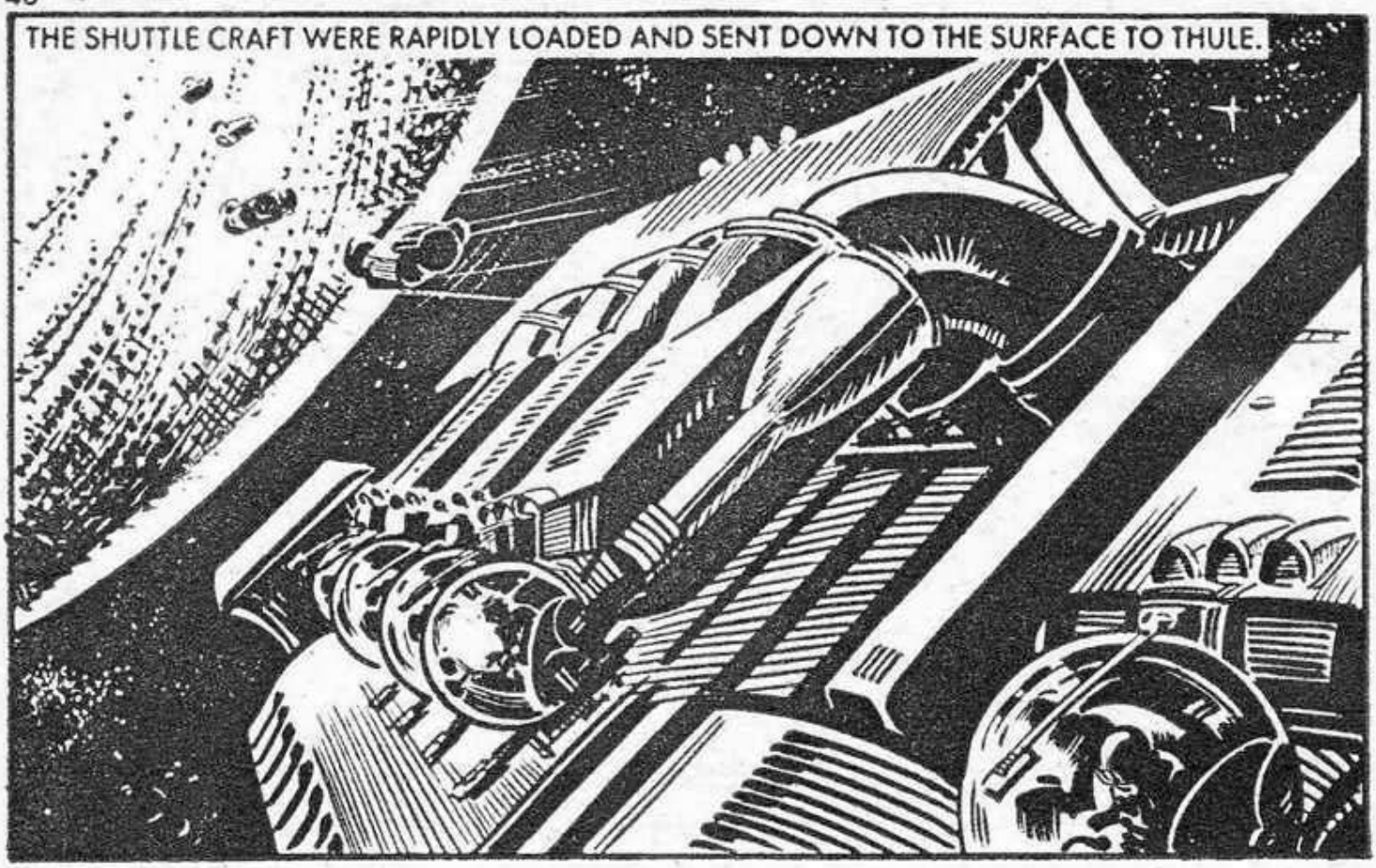
AND IT HAS BEEN MANUFACTURING DEATH ROBOTS SINCE IT LEFT FAREET MANY SPACIALS AGO—THE EARTHLINGS ARE FINISHED . . .

IN EARTH HQ—

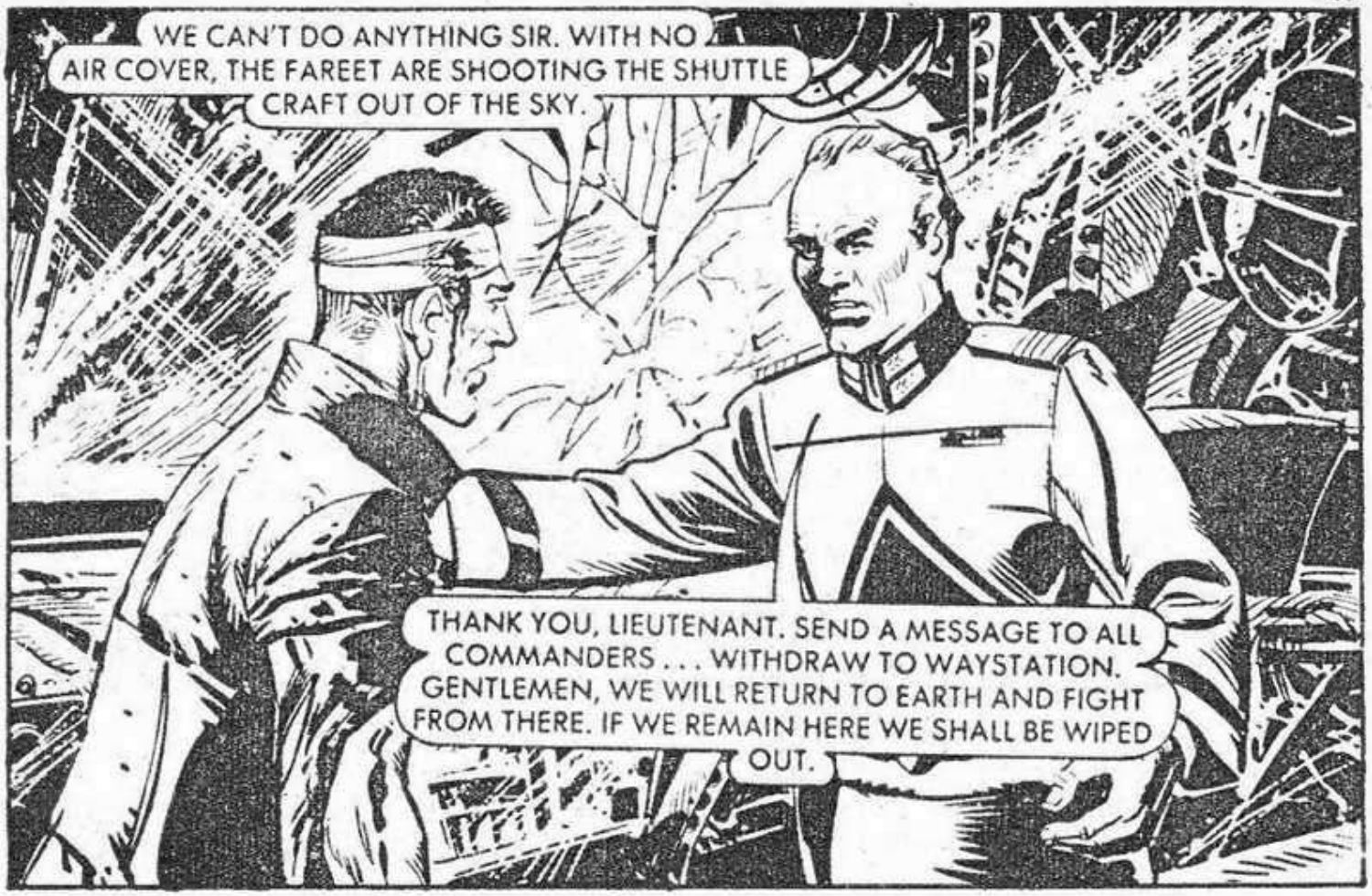
WHAT ON EARTH?

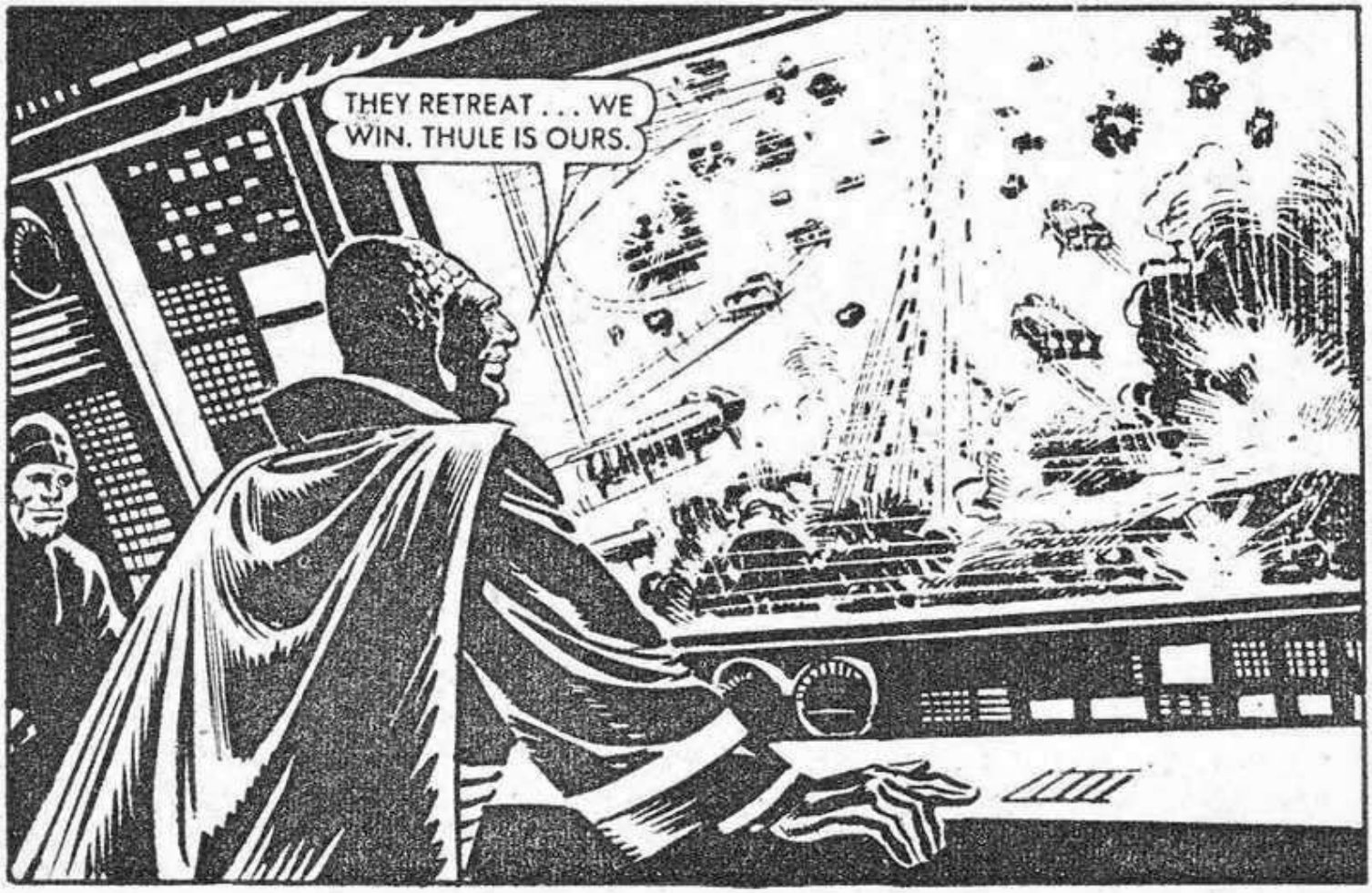

THIS LOOKS LIKE THE END FOR US. THOSE ROBOTS WILL WIPE OUT WHAT REMAINS OF THE EARTH ARMY, UNLESS WE GET SUPPLIES SOON.

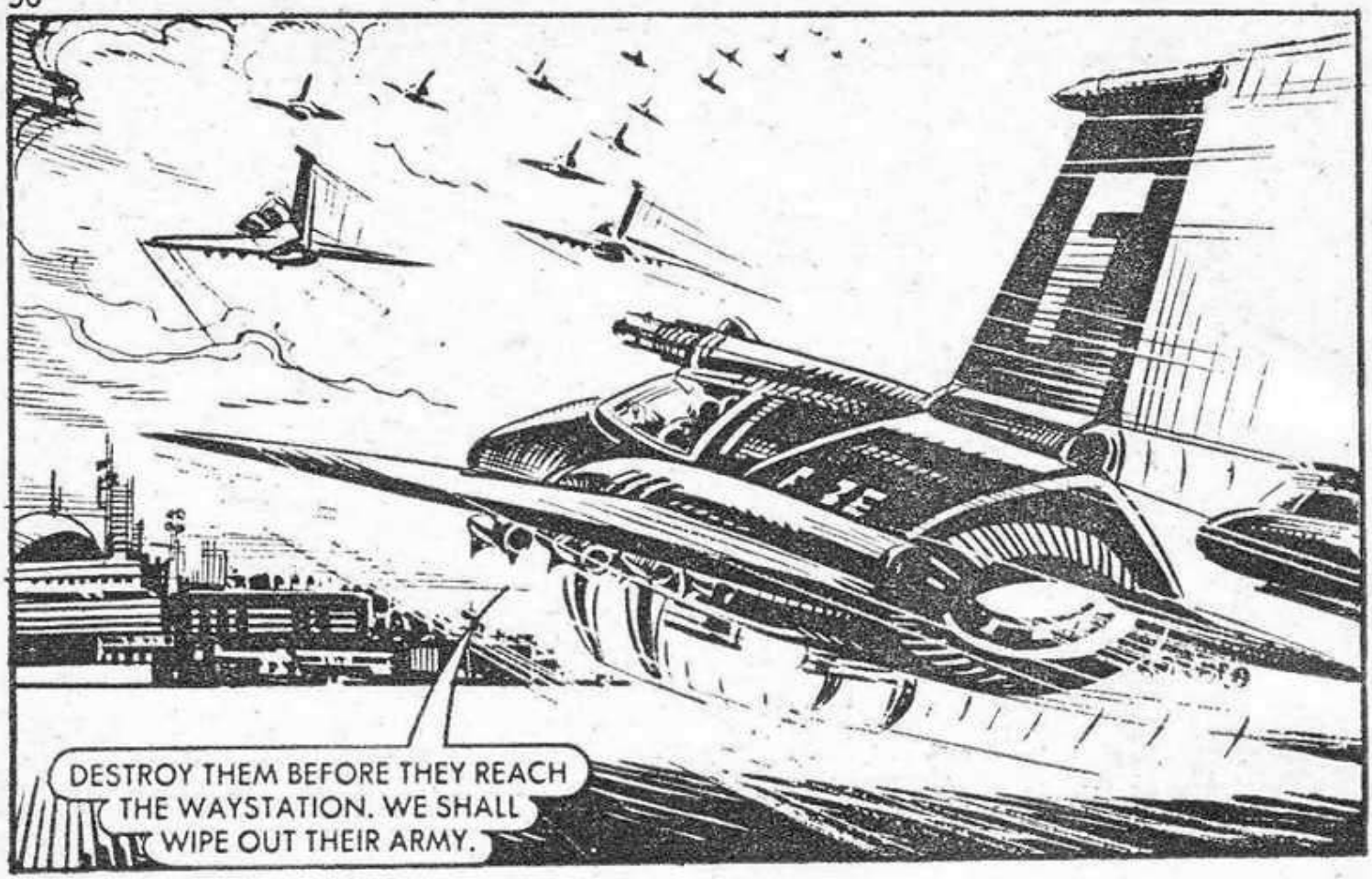
THULE WAYSTATION TO COMMAND. SUPPLIES HAVE ARRIVED. WILL COMMENCE TO SHUTTLE THEM DOWN.
WE MIGHT HAVE A CHANCE YET, ALTHOUGH WE'RE UNDER ATTACK.

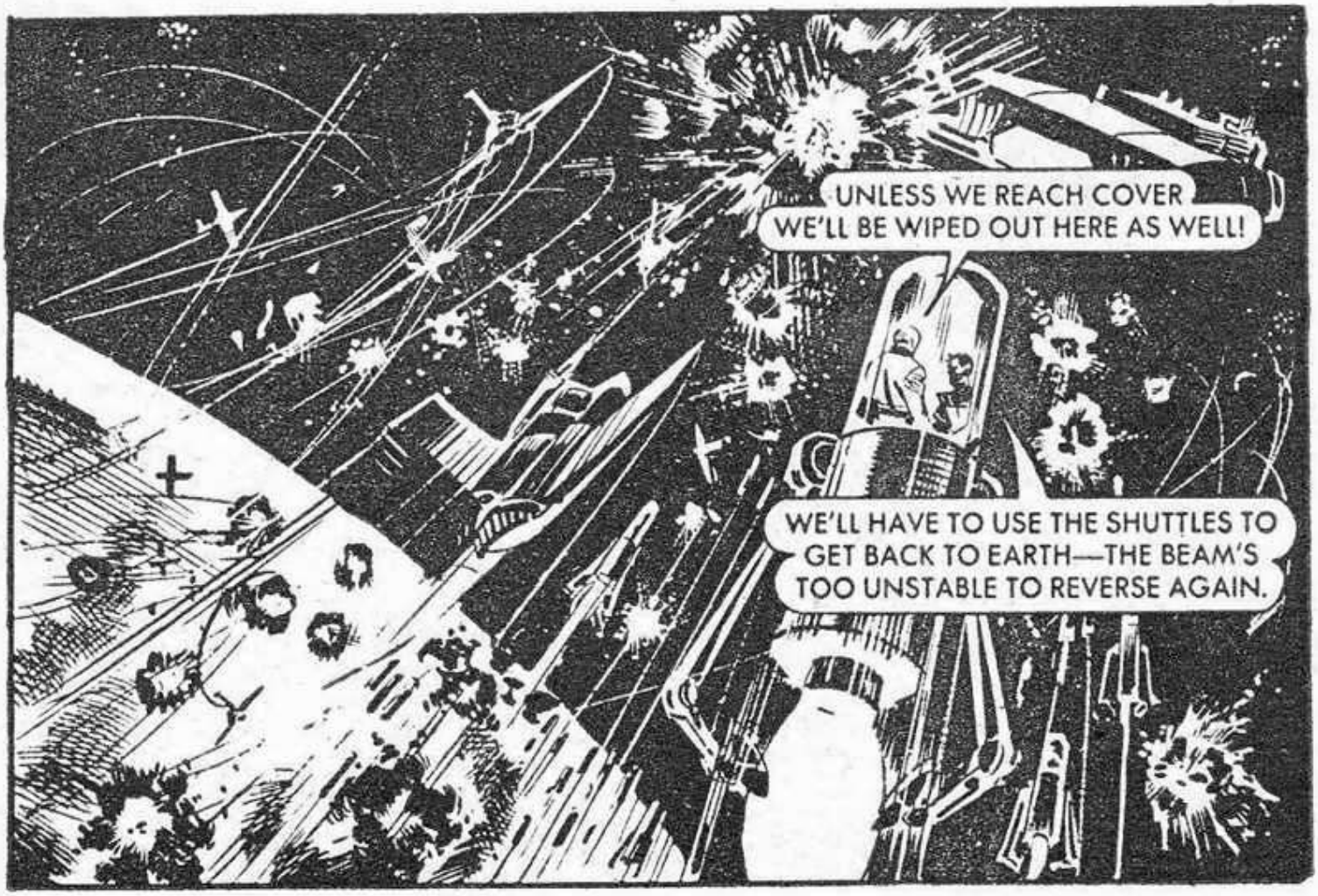

THE SHUTTLE CRAFT WERE RAPIDLY LOADED AND SENT DOWN TO THE SURFACE TO THULE.

FAREET GROUNDSTRIKERS PICKED OFF THE UNARMED SHUTTLES.
POOR GUY—HE NEVER HAD A CHANCE.
AND THERE GOES OUR LAST CHANCE OF SURVIVAL.


WE CAN'T DO ANYTHING SIR. WITH NO AIR COVER, THE FAREET ARE SHOOTING THE SHUTTLE CRAFT OUT OF THE SKY.
THANK YOU, LIEUTENANT. SEND A MESSAGE TO ALL COMMANDERS . . . WITHDRAW TO WAYSTATION. GENTLEMEN, WE WILL RETURN TO EARTH AND FIGHT FROM THERE. IF WE REMAIN HERE WE SHALL BE WIPED OUT.

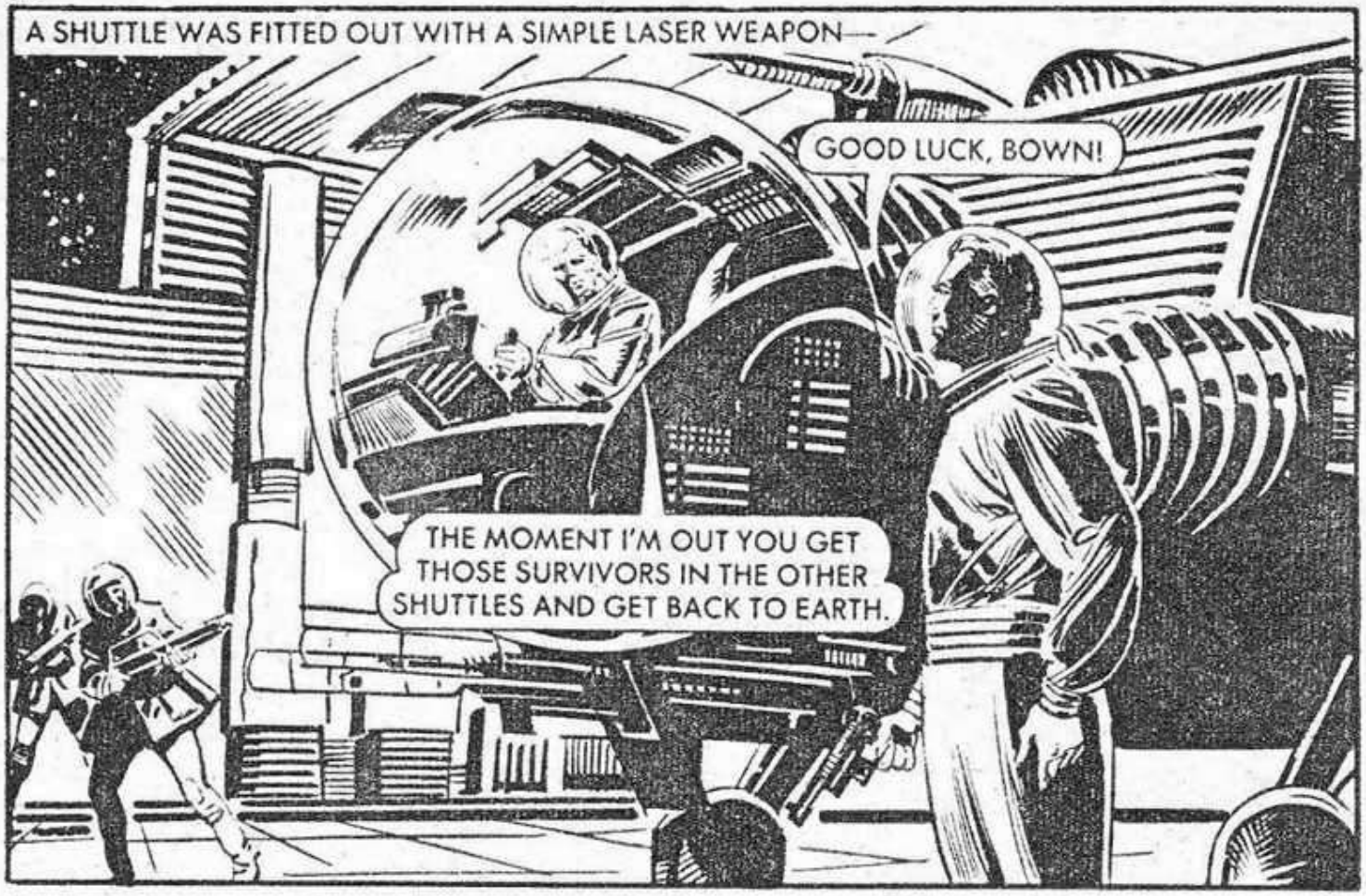

THEY RETREAT . . . WE WIN. THULE IS OURS.

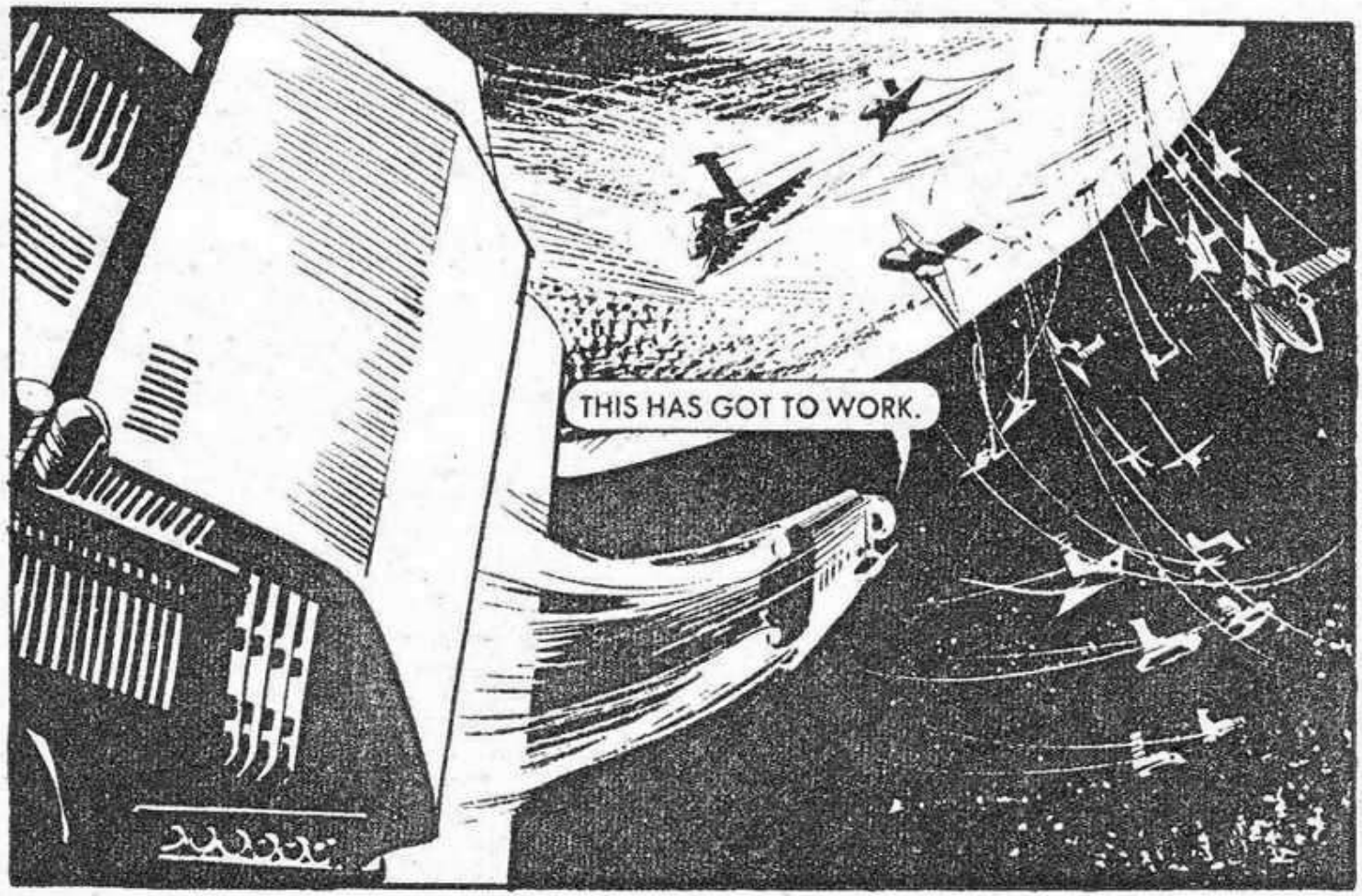

DESTROY THEM BEFORE THEY REACH THE WAYSTATION. WE SHALL WIPE OUT THEIR ARMY.

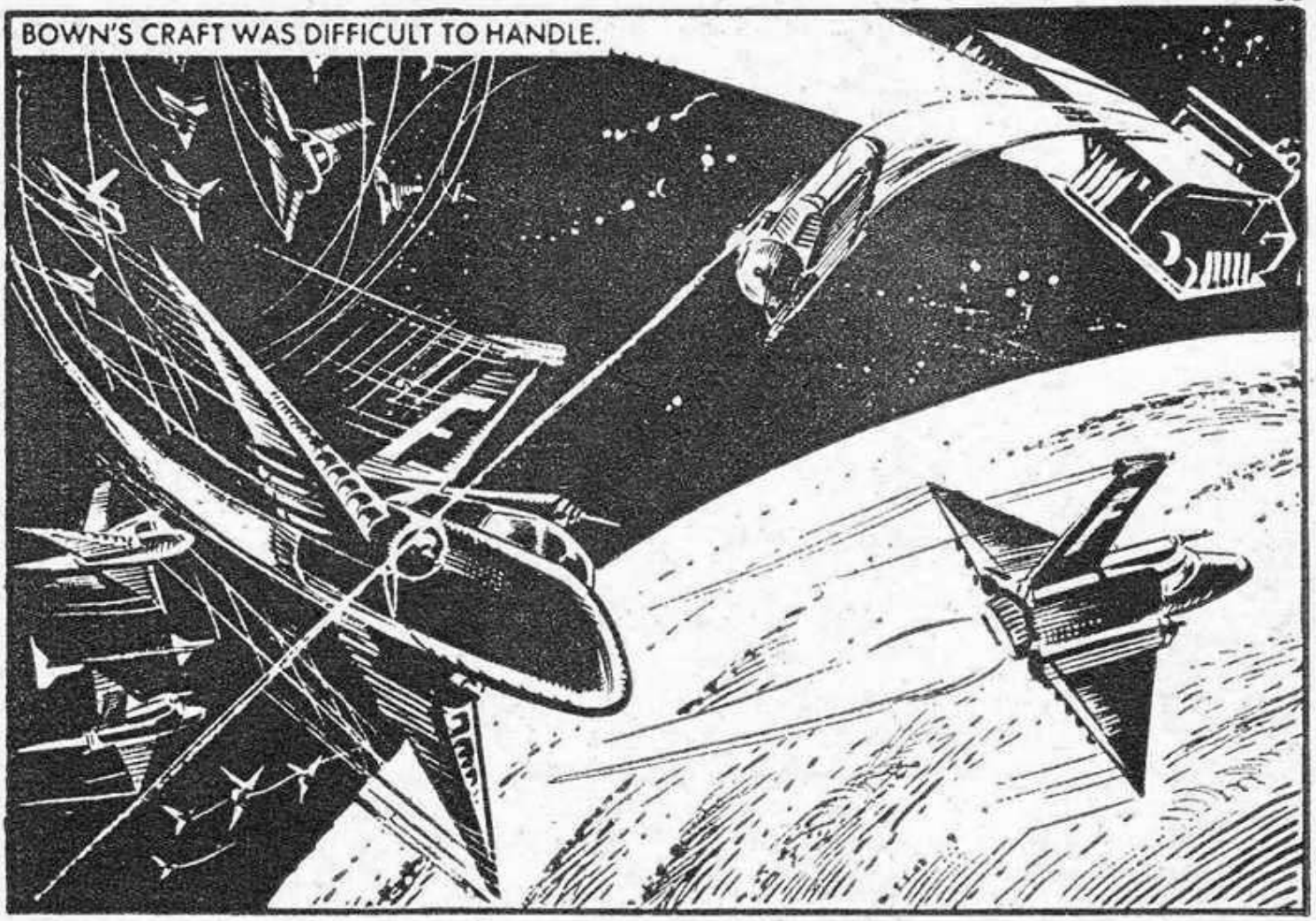

UNLESS WE REACH COVER WE'LL BE WIPED OUT HERE AS WELL!
WE'LL HAVE TO USE THE SHUTTLES TO GET BACK TO EARTH—THE BEAM'S TOO UNSTABLE TO REVERSE AGAIN.

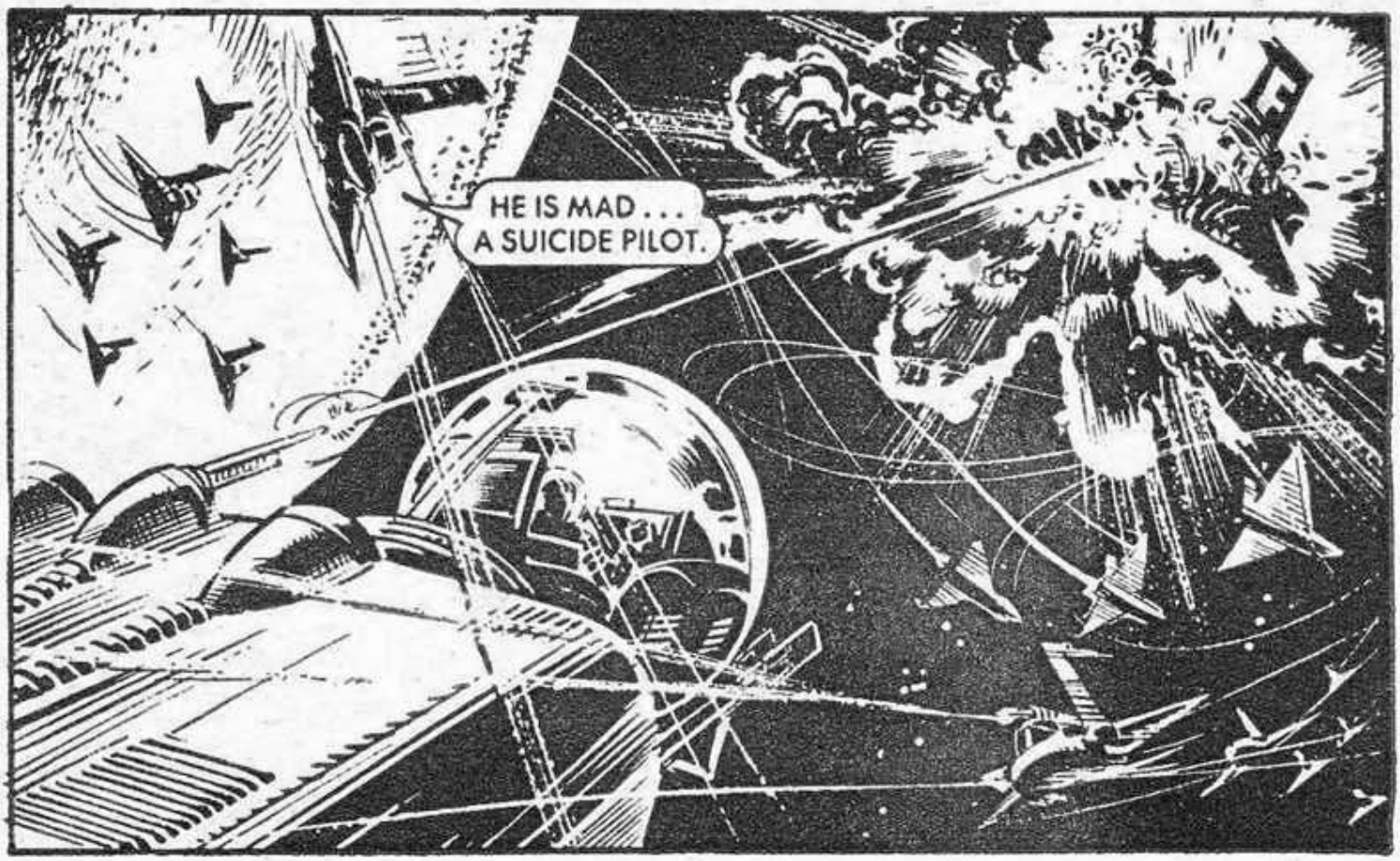
WE'RE TRAPPED HERE. AS LONG AS THOSE FAREET CRAFT ARE FLYING WE'LL NOT GET FAR IN THE SHUTTLES.
BUT IF THEY'RE NOT FLYING . . .

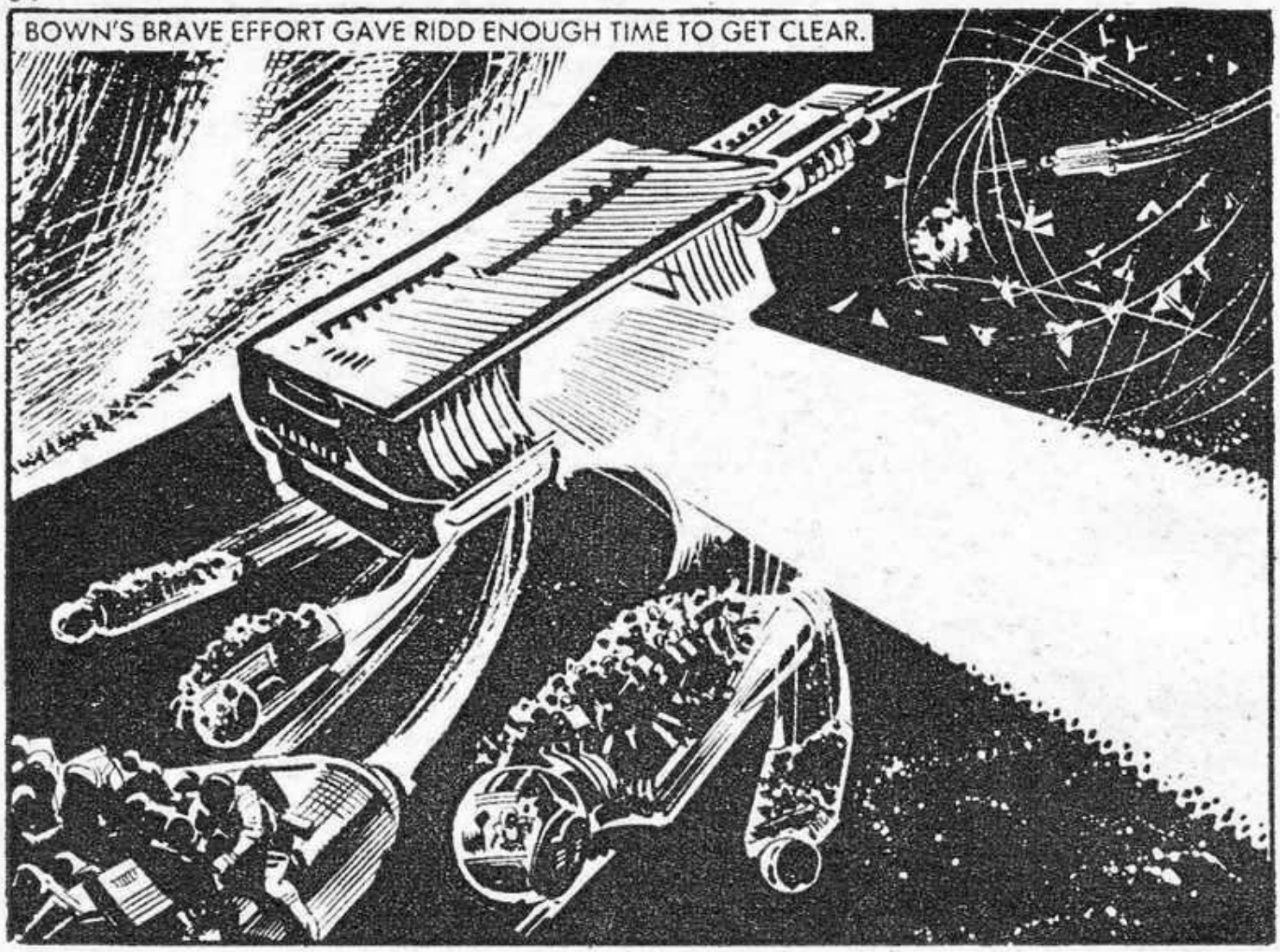
THERE ARE ENOUGH LASER CHARGES TO RIG UP A FAIRLY EFFECTIVE LASER CANNON. FIX IT TO A SHUTTLE AND YOU HAVE A MAKESHIFT FIGHTER.
IT MIGHT JUST WORK.

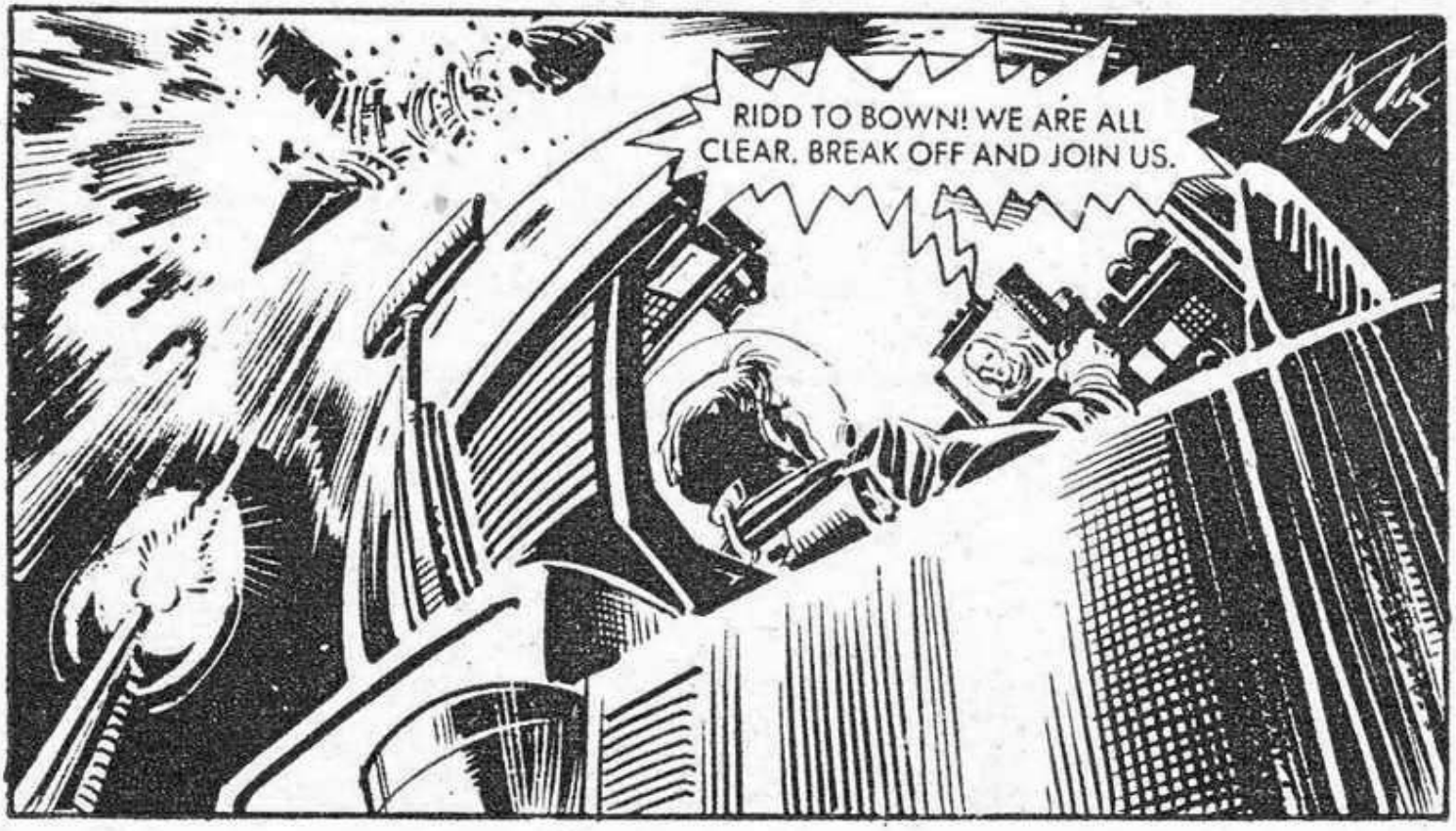

A SHUTTLE WAS FITTED OUT WITH A SIMPLE LASER WEAPON—
GOOD LUCK, BOWN!
THE MOMENT I'M OUT YOU GET THOSE SURVIVORS IN THE OTHER SHUTTLES AND GET BACK TO EARTH.

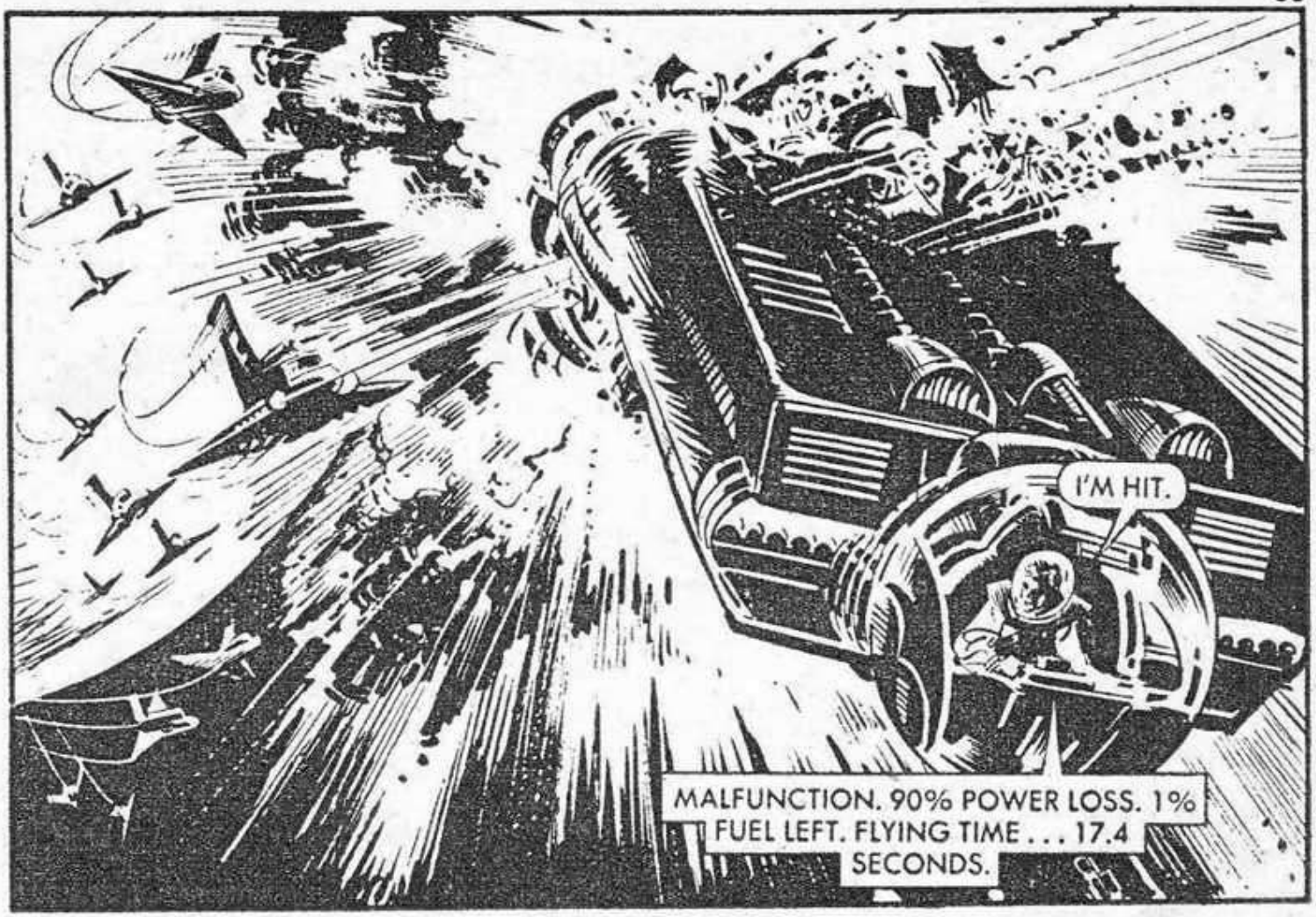

THIS HAS GOT TO WORK.

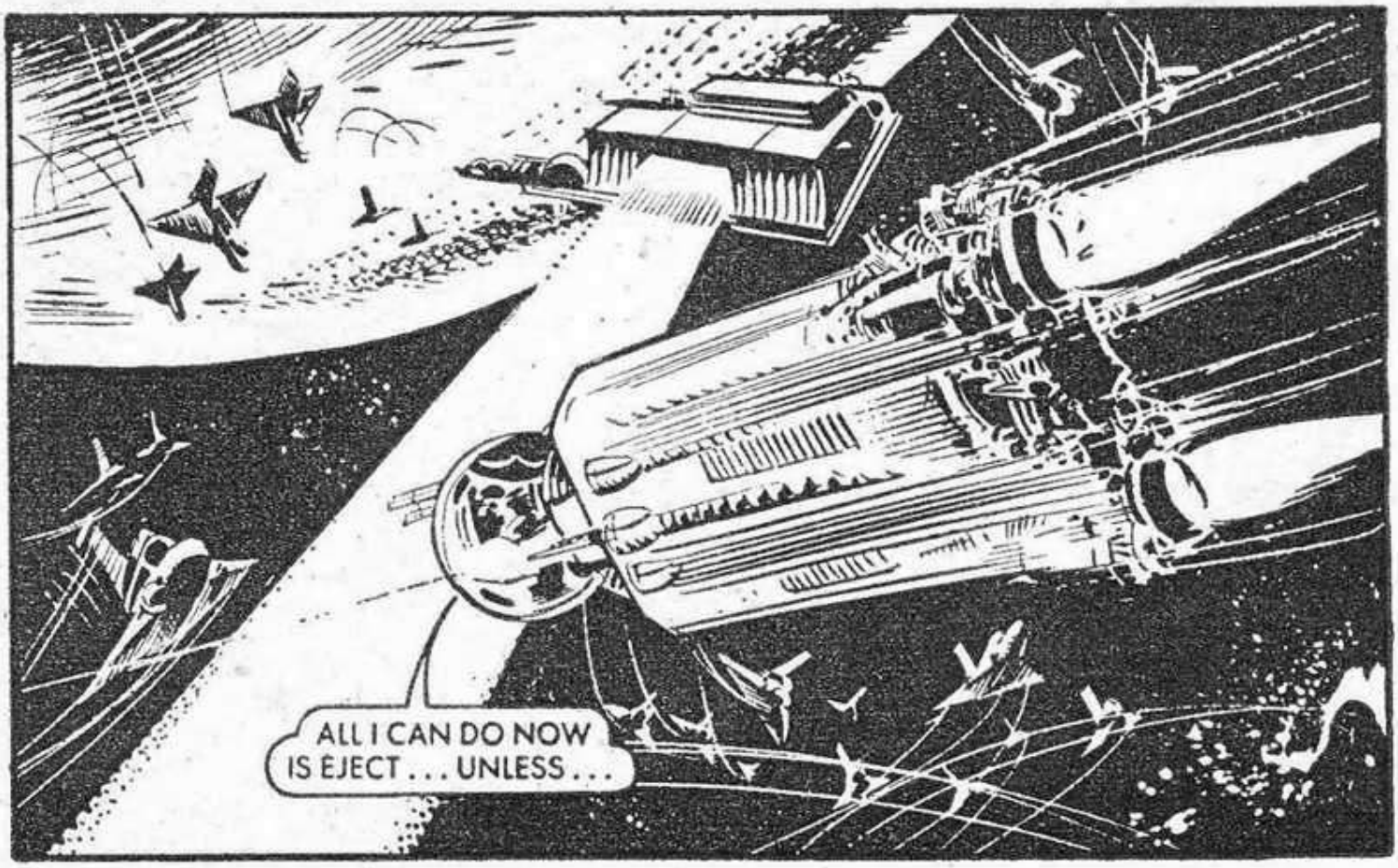

BOWN'S CRAFT WAS DIFFICULT TO HANDLE.

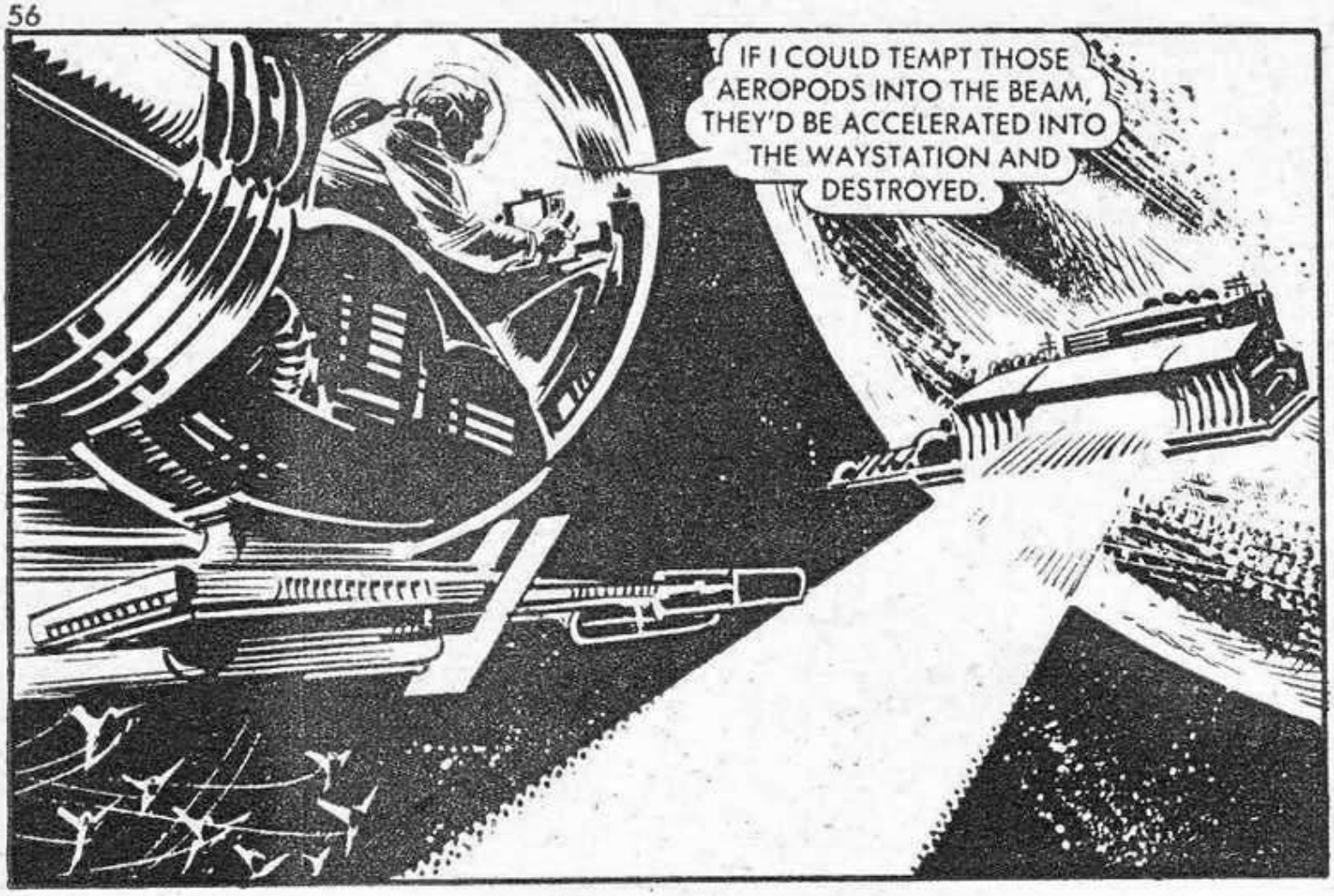

HE IS MAD . . .
A SUICIDE PILOT.

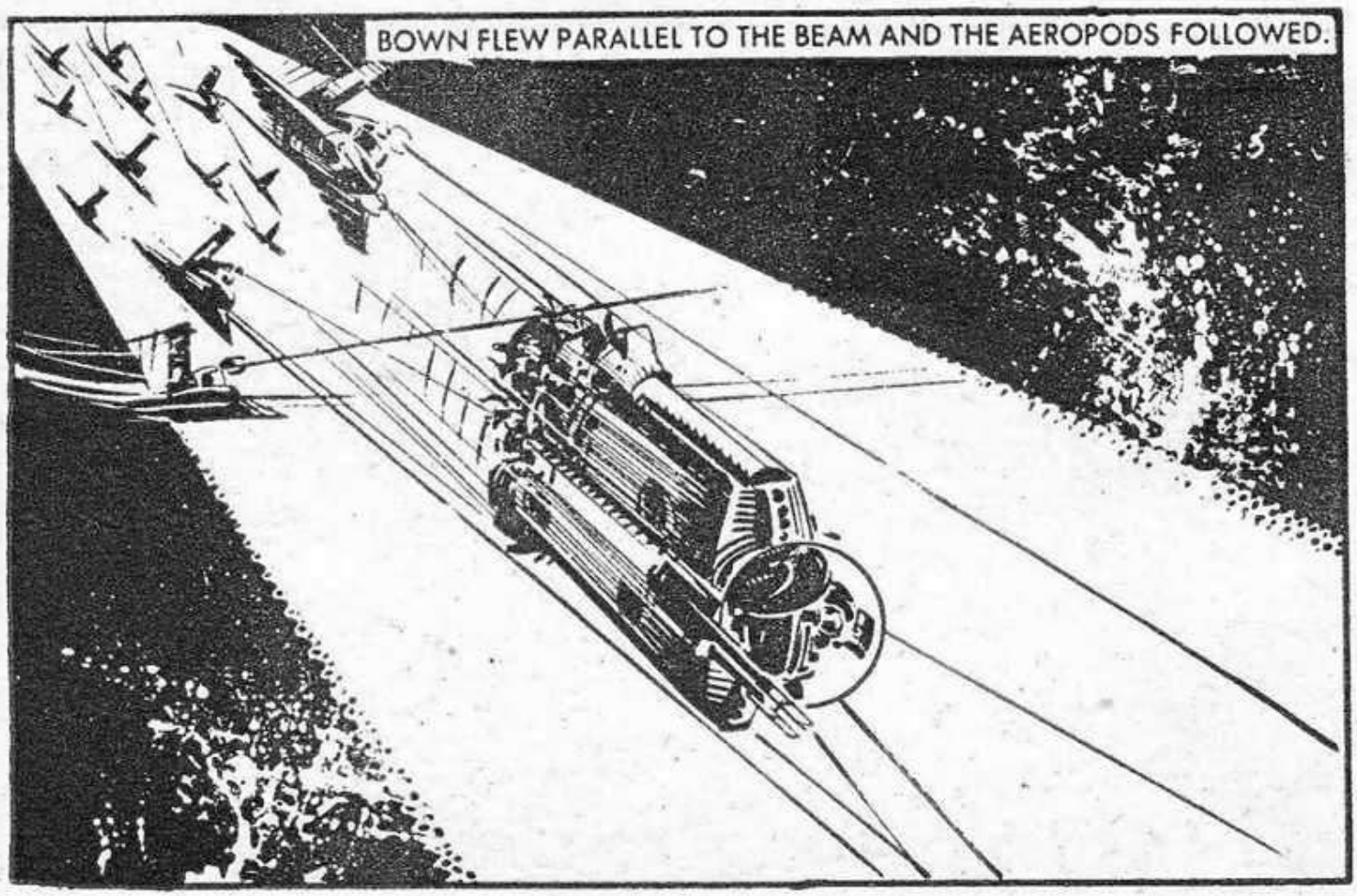

BOWN'S BRAVE EFFORT GAVE RIDD ENOUGH TIME TO GET CLEAR.

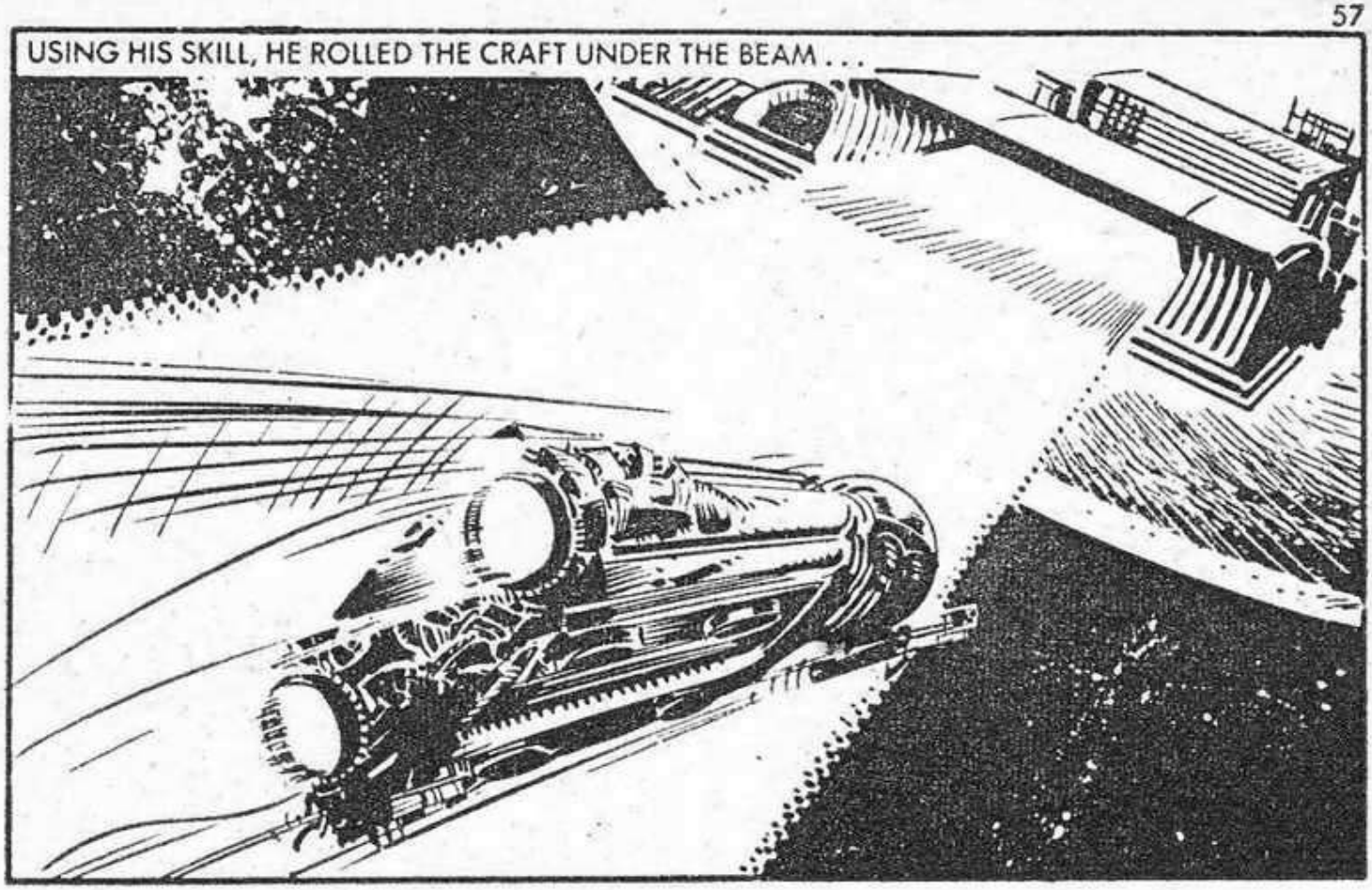

RIDD TO BOWN! WE ARE ALL CLEAR. BREAK OFF AND JOIN US.

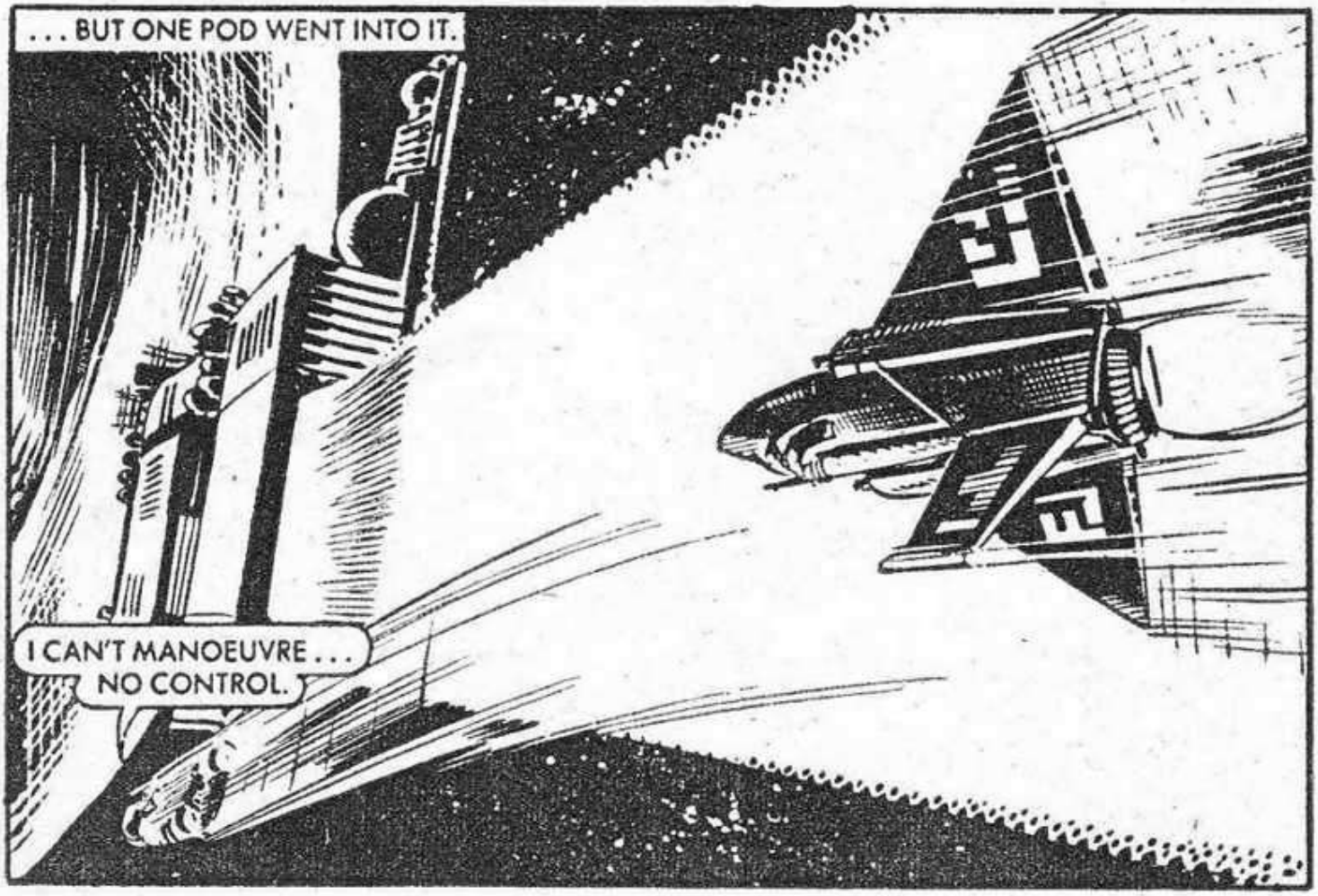

I'M HIT.
MALFUNCTION. 90% POWER LOSS. 1% FUEL LEFT. FLYING TIME . . . 17.4 SECONDS.


ALL I CAN DO NOW IS EJECT . . . UNLESS . . .


IF I COULD TEMPT THOSE AEROPODS INTO THE BEAM, THEY'D BE ACCELERATED INTO THE WAYSTATION AND DESTROYED.

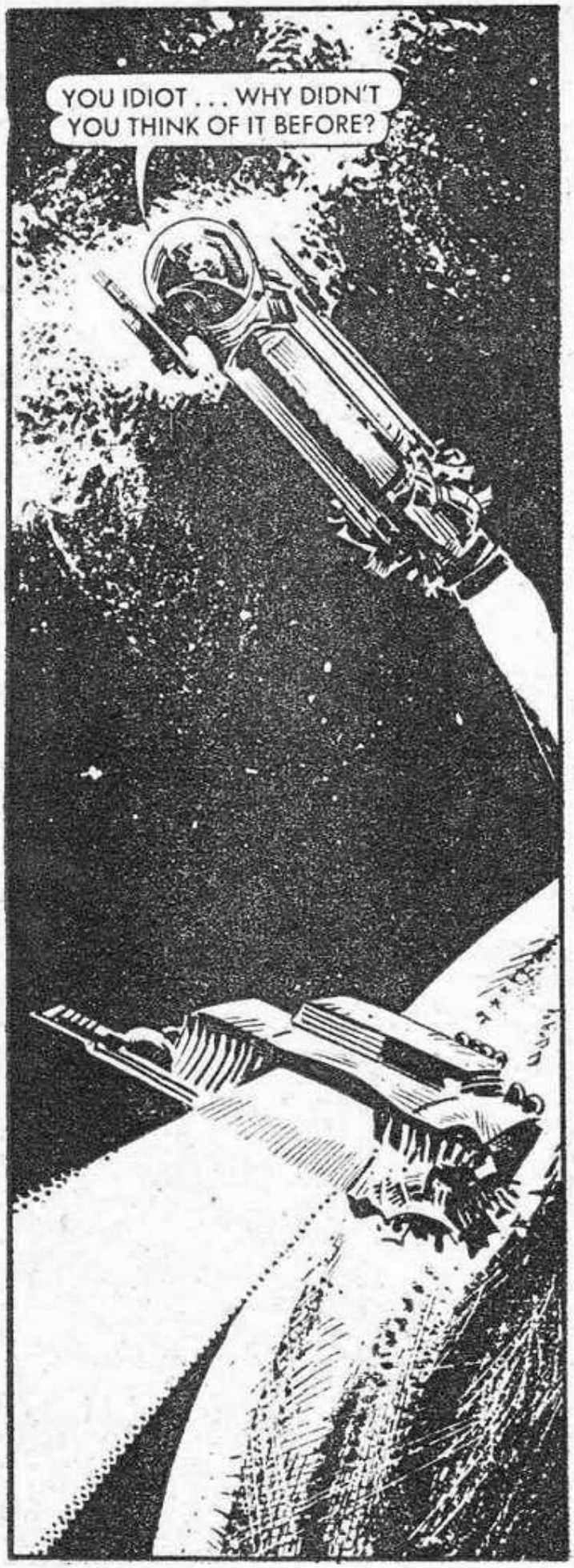

BOWN FLEW PARALLEL TO THE BEAM AND THE AEROPODS FOLLOWED.

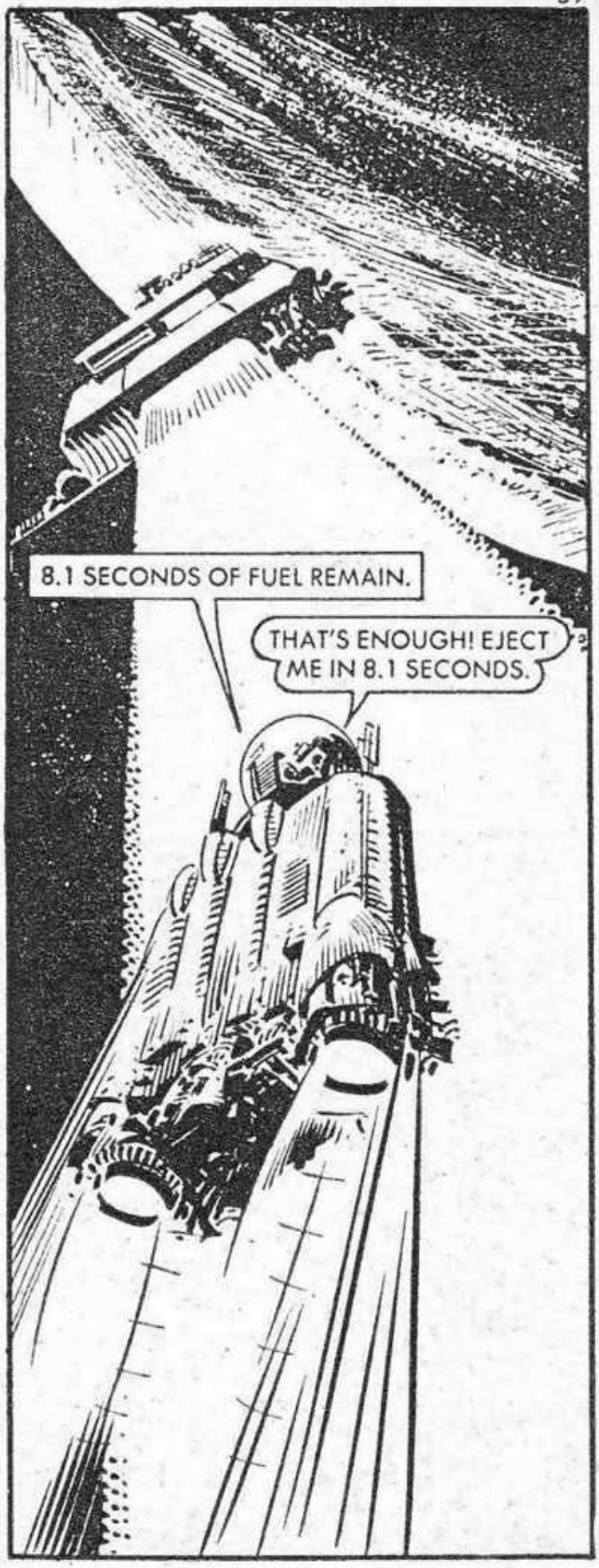

USING HIS SKILL, HE ROLLED THE CRAFT UNDER THE BEAM . . .

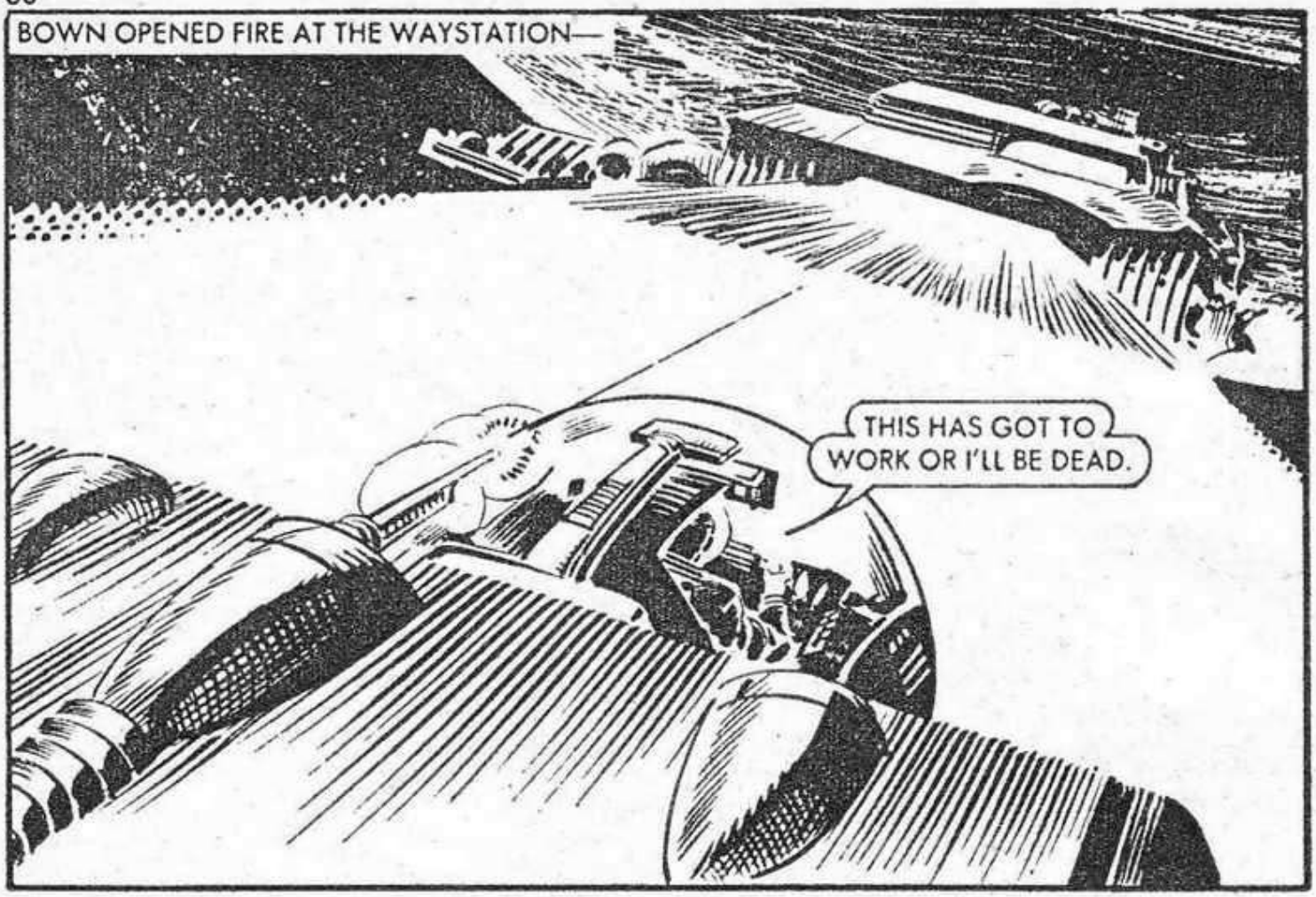

. . . BUT ONE POD WENT INTO IT.
I CAN'T MANOEUVRE . . . NO CONTROL.

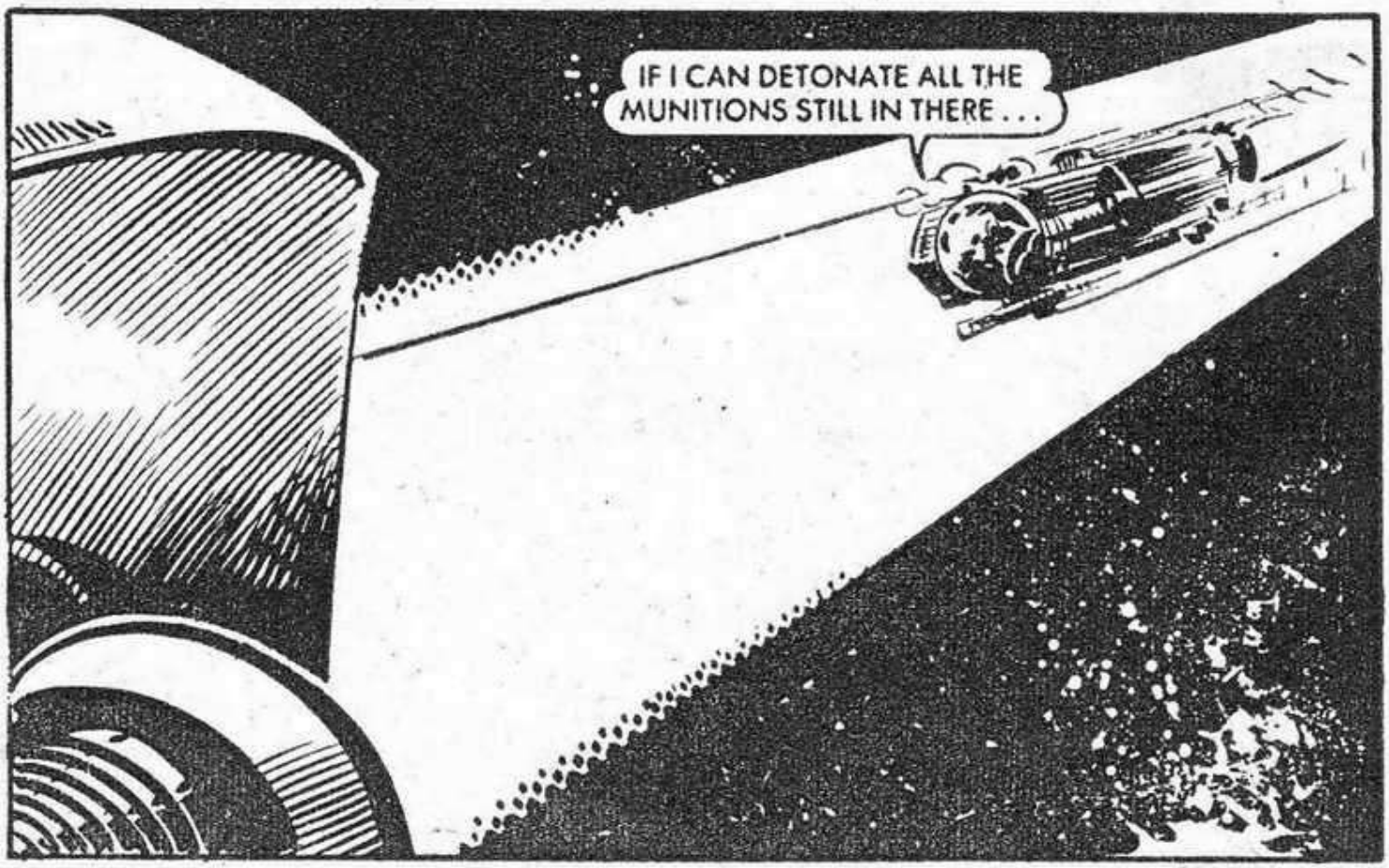
ONLY ONE . . .

FUEL RUNS OUT IN 12.17 SECONDS. CRAFT WILL LOSE FORWARD VELOCITY AND BE DRAGGED INTO THULE'S GRAVITATIONAL PULL.
TO BE BURNT UP ON RE-ENTRY.


YOU IDIOT . . . WHY DIDN'T YOU THINK OF IT BEFORE?

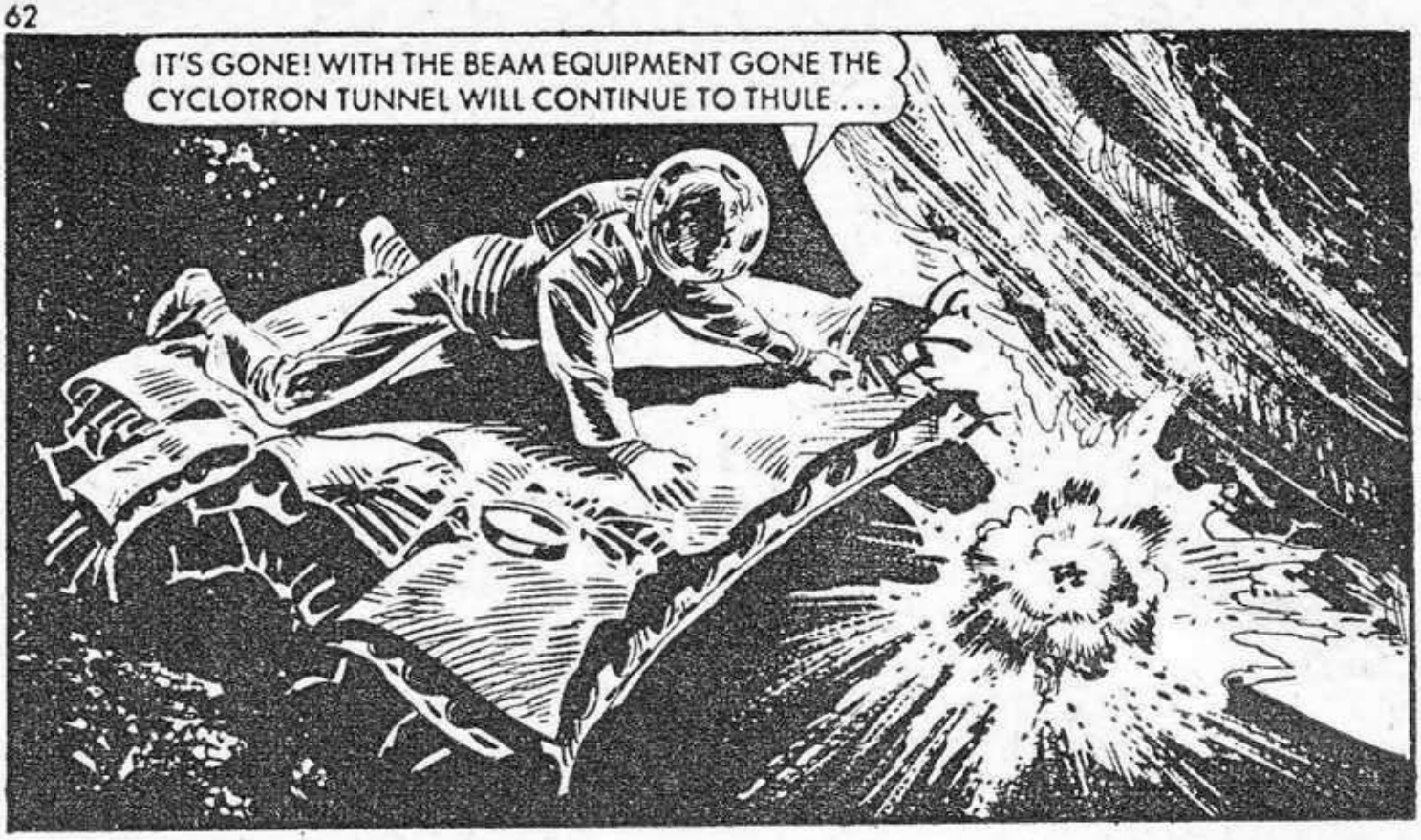

8.1 SECONDS OF FUEL REMAIN.
THAT'S ENOUGH! EJECT ME IN 8.1 SECONDS.

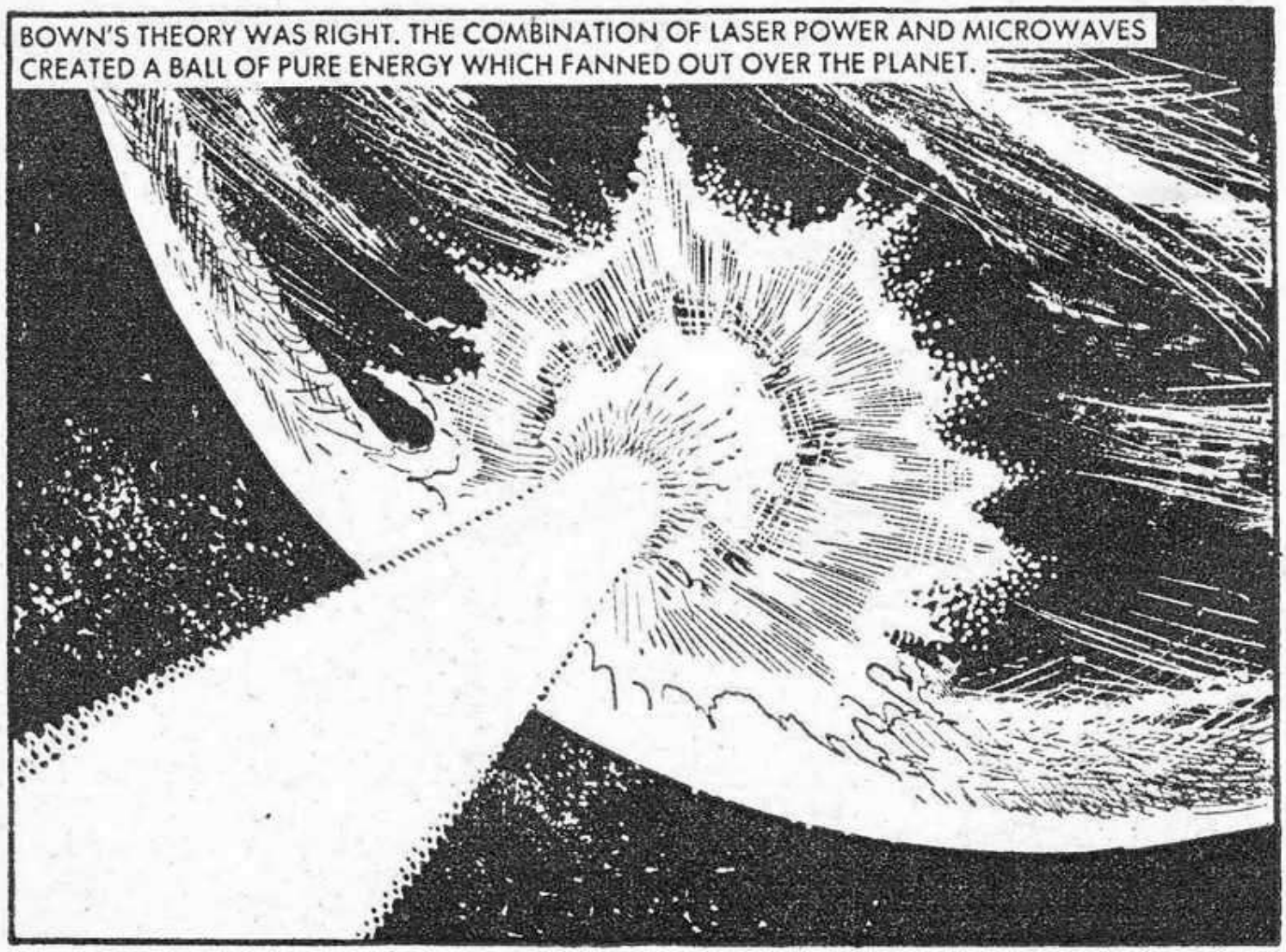

BOWN OPENED FIRE AT THE WAYSTATION—
THIS HAS GOT TO WORK OR I'LL BE DEAD.


IF I CAN DETONATE ALL THE MUNITIONS STILL IN THERE . . .

EJECTED! I HOPE I DID ENOUGH.

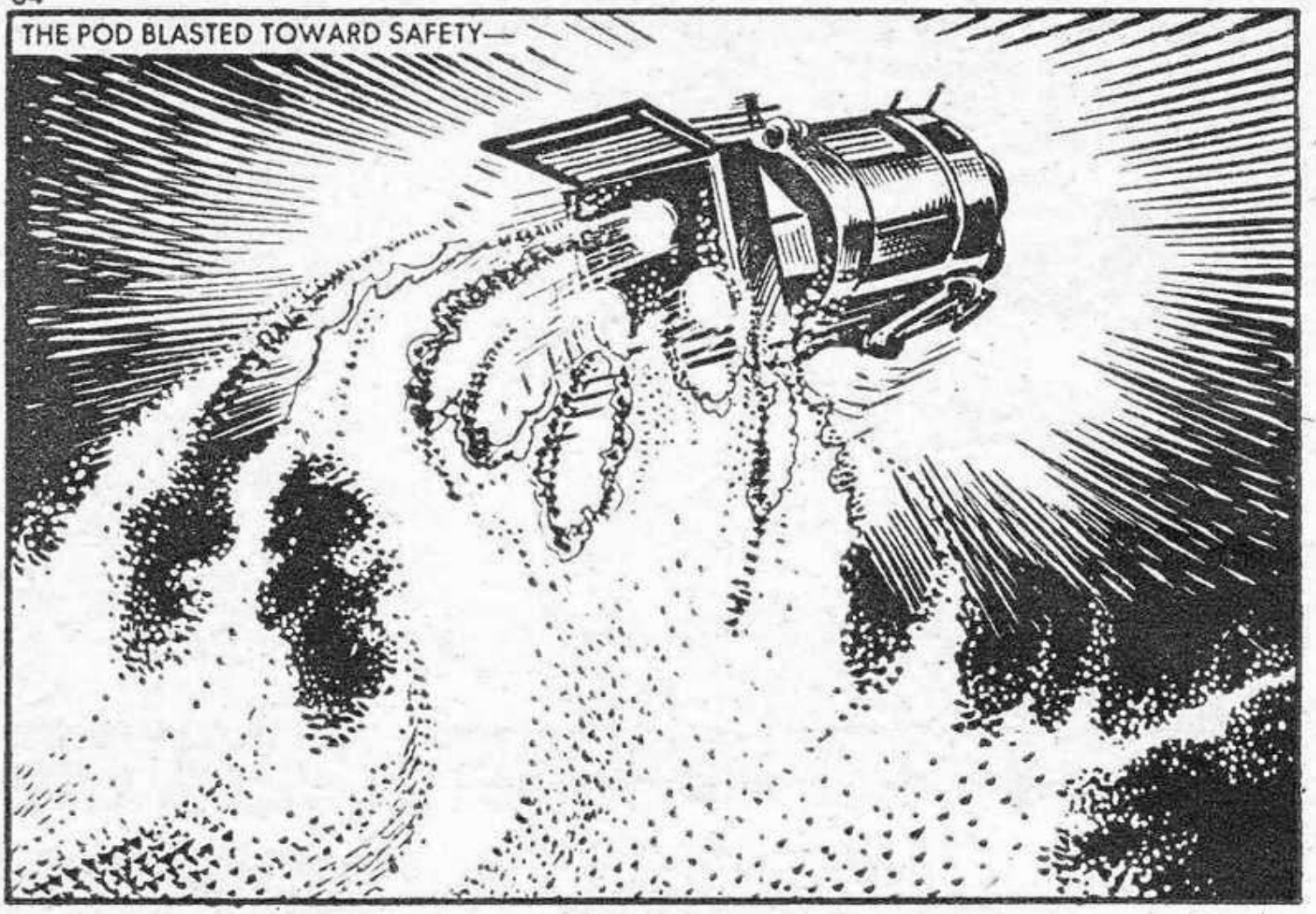
THE SHUTTLE PLUNGED INTO THE WAYSTATION AT LIGHT SPEED.


IT'S GONE! WITH THE BEAM EQUIPMENT GONE THE CYCLOTRON TUNNEL WILL CONTINUE TO THULE . . .

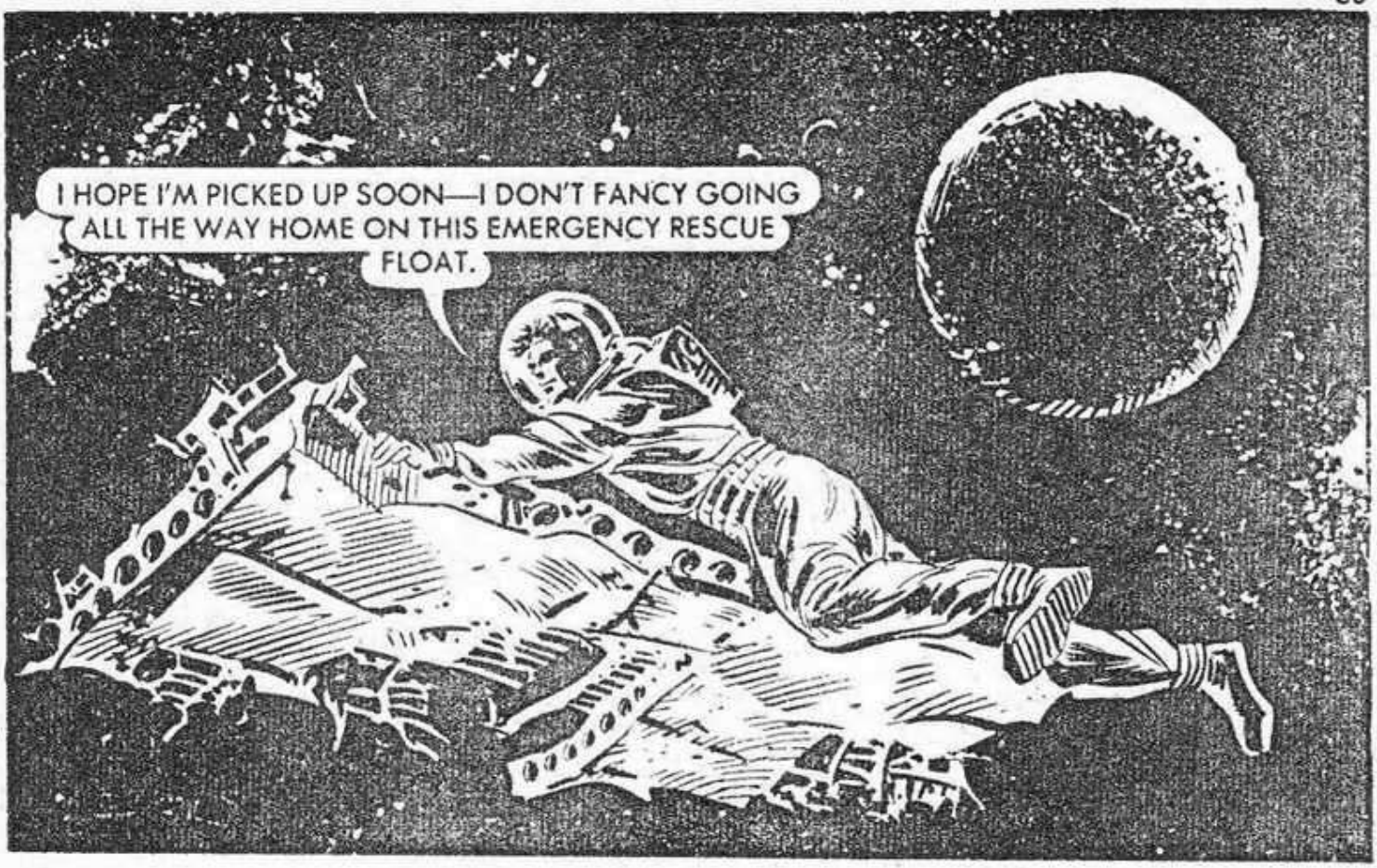

BOWN'S THEORY WAS RIGHT. THE COMBINATION OF LASER POWER AND MICROWAVES CREATED A BALL OF PURE ENERGY WHICH FANNED OUT OVER THE PLANET.

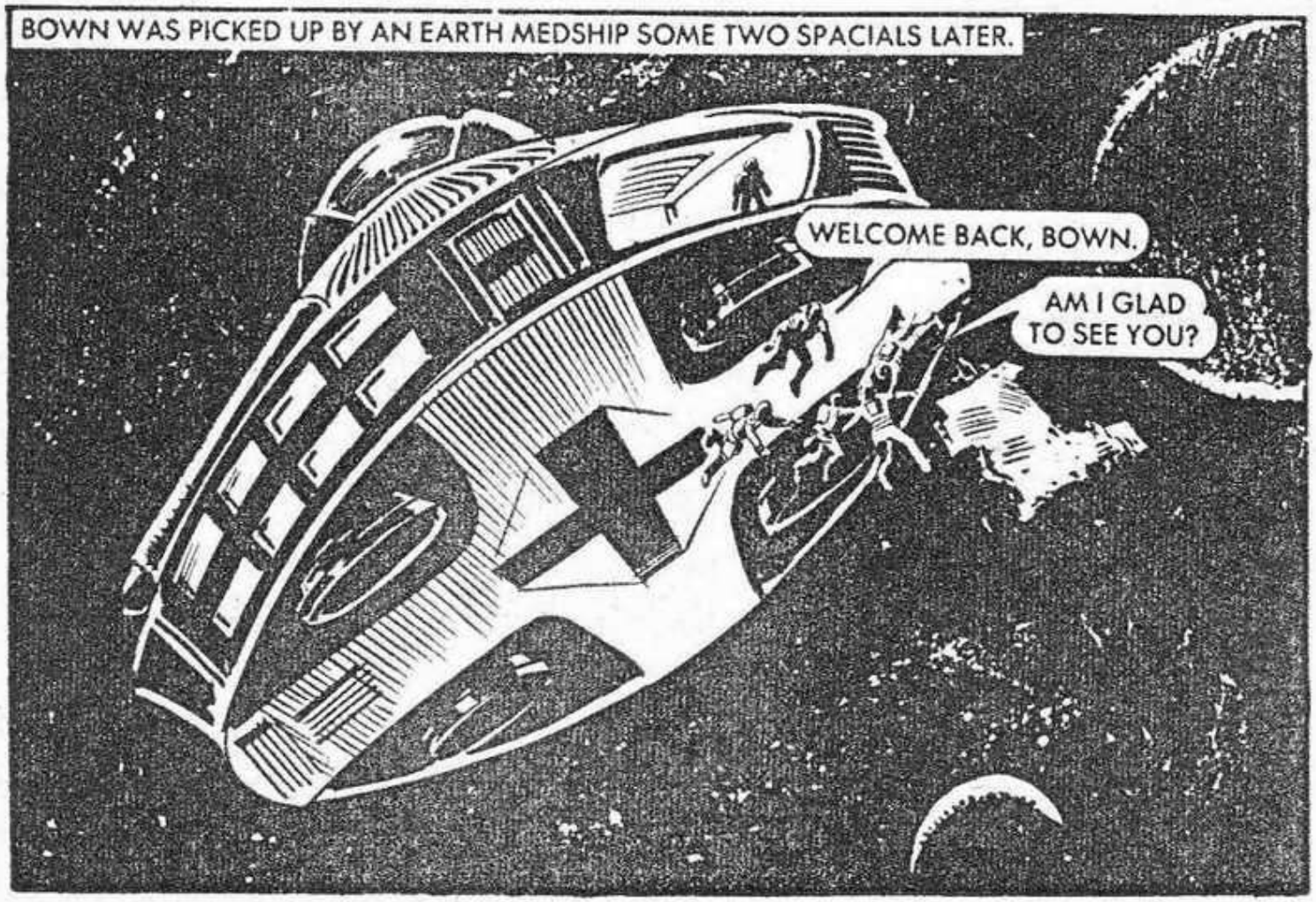
ON THULE, A WAVE OF DESTRUCTION THREATENED GANNO'S H.Q.—
MEGASSAH! MY ESCAPE POD . . . WHERE IS IT?

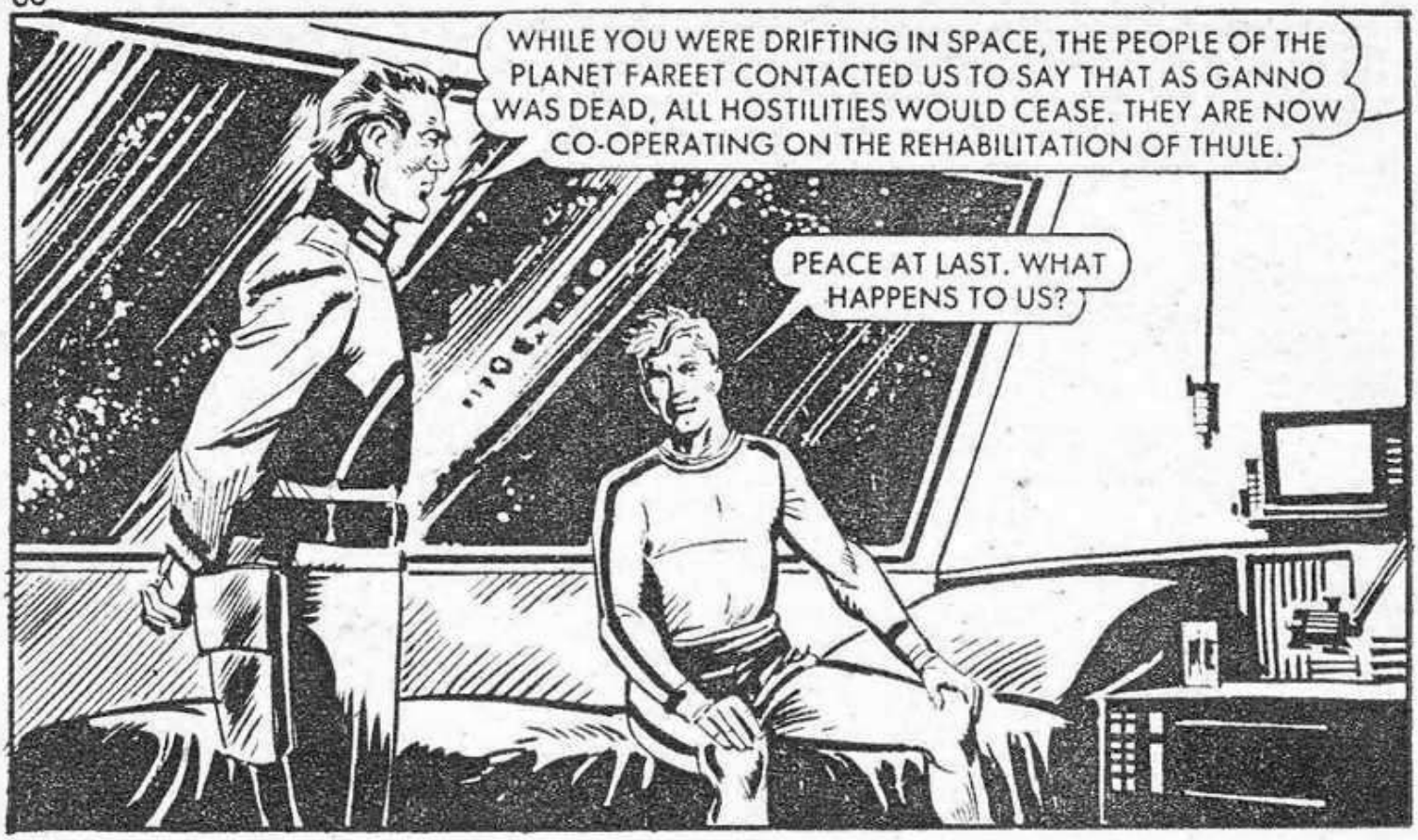
F1
START THE ESCAPE SEQUENCE, YOU FOOLS.

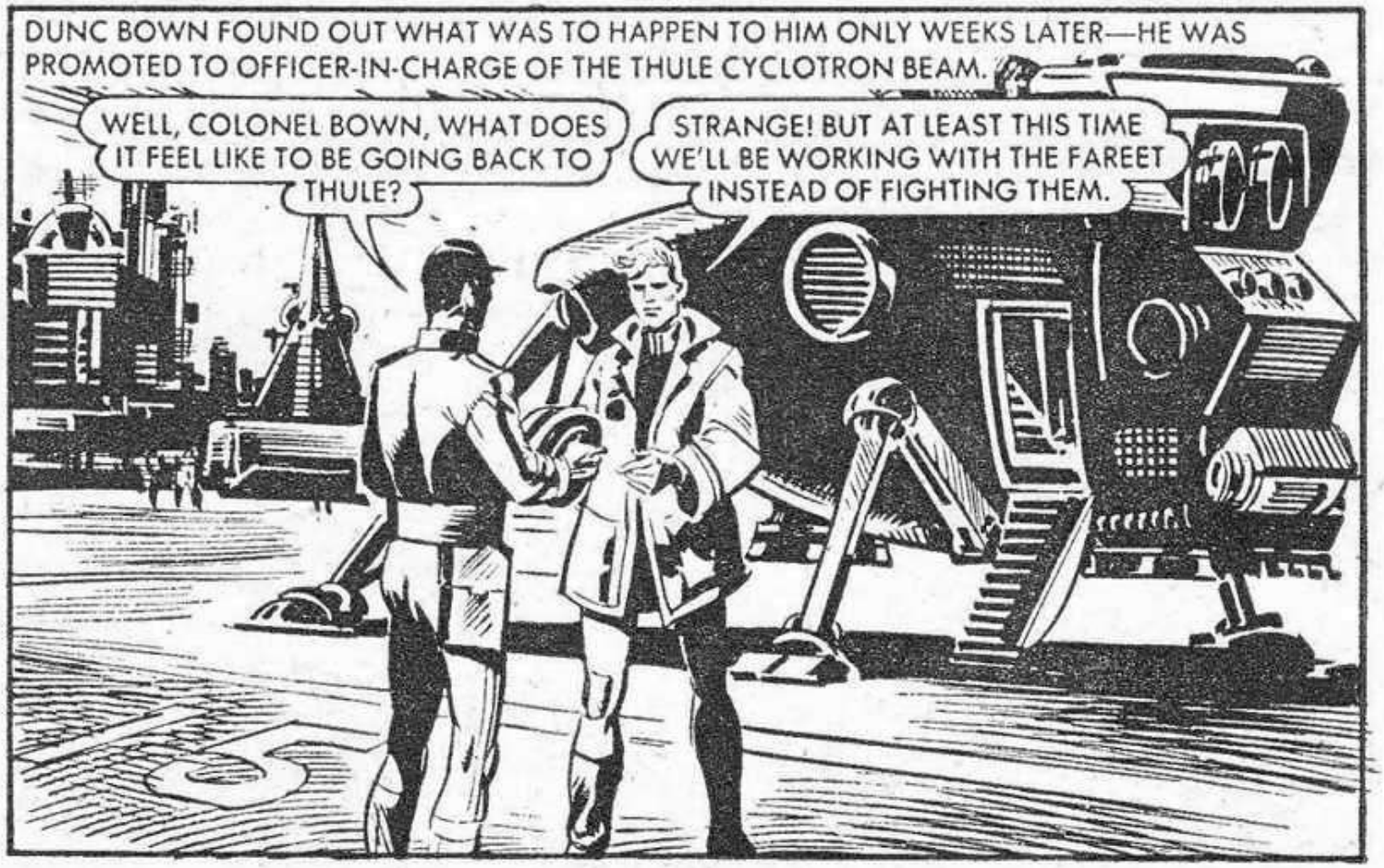

THE POD BLASTED TOWARD SAFETY—

BUT IT WAS TOO LATE . . . THE FIRST LAYERS OF DESTRUCTION TORE THE POWER PACKS TO PIECES AND GANNO PLUNGED TO HIS DEATH.
THAT'S THE END OF THE FAREET. THAT ENERGY CLOUD WILL DISSIPATE OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, AND BY THEN WE SHOULD BE READY TO REBUILD THULE.


I HOPE I'M PICKED UP SOON—I DON'T FANCY GOING ALL THE WAY HOME ON THIS EMERGENCY RESCUE FLOAT.


BOWN WAS PICKED UP BY AN EARTH MEDSHIP SOME TWO SPACIALS LATER.
WELCOME BACK, BOWN.
AM I GLAD TO SEE YOU?





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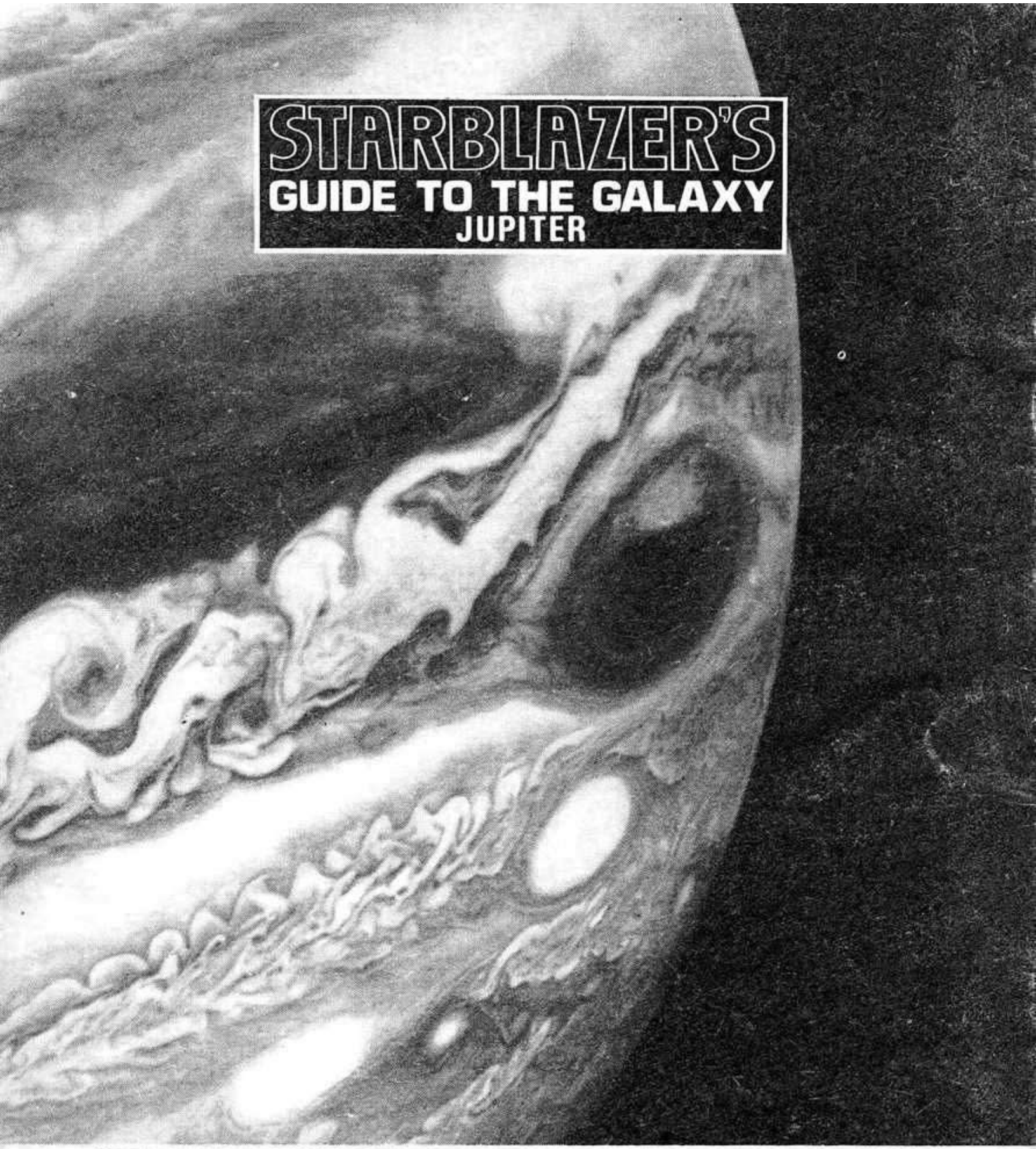
DON'T MISS THIS MONTH'S OTHER ACTION-PACKED ADVENTURE

NOW ON SALE



JUPITER is the most massive of the planets and fifth from the Sun. It is the only other planet apart from Earth known to have a magnetic field. Of its 12 known satellites, one, Io, is larger than Mercury. This photograph was taken by Voyager 2 in 1979 and shows Jupiter's Red Spot.